

APRIL
PANHASARD



MURIEL HINE

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APRIL PANHASARD

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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HALF IN EARNEST

APRIL PANHASARD

By MURIEL HINE
(Mrs. Sidney Coxon)

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To
John Campbell Maclean
In Gratitude

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APRIL PANHASARD

A noiseless, patient spider,
I mark'd, where, on a little promontory, it stood, isolated;
Mark'd how, to explore the vacant, vast surrounding,
It launched forth filament, filament, filament, out of itself;
Ever unreeling them—ever tirelessly speeding them.

And you, O my Soul, where you stand,
Surrounded, surrounded, in measureless oceans of space,
Ceaselessly musing, venturing, throwing—seeking the
spheres, to connect them;
Till the bridge you will need be form'd—till the ductile an-
chor hold;
Till the gossamer thread you fling, catch somewhere, O my
Soul.

—WALT WHITMAN.

APRIL PANHASARD

CHAPTER I

IT was a May day, born of smiles and tears: inconsequent, feminine, and extremely beautiful.

First a shower fell, light and vapourish, spangling the baby buds of the lilac in the Park and adding yet another film of mud to Piccadilly, already sorely tried by that epidemic of Spring which quarantines certain sections for the use of workmen and attracts mysteriously heavy traffic from side streets to lumber past the yawning gaps in the roadway.

Peeping from under a heavy cloud, the May day watched the scene with mischievous delight. Heavy men in corduroy, disentangling themselves from the sticky clay, reached out smeared arms toward their distant coats, trim coachmen wriggled into mackintoshes, all and sundry prepared for rain.

Then, with perplexing swiftness, the mood changed. A deep sigh, fluttering the green leaves of the Park, swept lightly across the street, lifting a hat here, a flapping overcoat there, wound tight skirts still tighter round hurrying female forms, and sank, gratified, into rippling mirth.

Golden gleams of sunshine followed, flaunting across wet pavements with a pale and mischievous warmth, and completed the mortification of an elderly gentleman, immaculate in white spats, balancing himself somewhat tremulously under a silk umbrella, thrice unfurled, opened and furled anew between that channel of fond adventure known to the unimaginative as Bond Street and the safe harbourage of his Club.

Full well he knew the Spring-tide mood—in woman and in weather—and, soured by knowledge, glanced upward in mistrust. Moreover it breathed of hope, of sweet young wholesomeness and budding life: reincarnation of all that is not human, alas!

In his meretricious middle age it mocked him, from the crown of his silk hat, jauntily poised on his thin hair, down the stiff back where lumbago lurked to his very spats—whited sepulchres hiding the grim skeleton of Gout!

A soft gust of silent laughter careening down Dover Street spent its youthful energy on his still wide umbrella.

“Detestable!” he said fussily into his dyed moustache, resisting the unforeseen impetus of the charge and then, sharply:

“Damn!”

For a taxicab had stopped dead beside him, with a crude grinding of brakes and a vicious side splash from the full gutter, embroidering fantastically the primitive purity of his spats.

Halting to consider the damage and still muttering

under his breath, he narrowly escaped collision with a swinging figure, head lost under a wide tray that was veiled in green baize mystery.

"Gárn!" said that youth trenchantly as he swerved aside, "ole' figure o' fun—own the blessed street!"—and paused to wink at a passing ticket-collector, holding on to the step of his bus like a human spider agog for flies. His shrill boy's voice floated back on the rain-washed air.

"Minds 'is luvly complexion, don't 'ee?"—as the sunshine, a willing accomplice in the game, poured down in single-hearted joy on the now unnecessary umbrella.

As the elderly gentleman proceeded to wrestle with it under the lee of the shops the door of the offending taxi was swung back and a man jumped out, neatly, with laughing face and the ease of young limbs.

"This the place?" he inquired and rattled on without waiting for a reply:

"Mind the step—it's thick with mud!"

He extended to his hidden companion a helpful hand, lost in a glaring chamois glove, carefully unbuttoned, and added:

"Jump!"

A sweet and peculiarly clear voice answered, with the irrelevance of modern conversation:

"You stay here and smoke, boy. I won't be long." And out there stepped a lady, gowned in dark-blue serge, severely cut. A small black toque fitted closely about her shining hair, and she wore brown boots, brown gloves, and carried a diminutive brown bag;

in truth as inconspicuous a costume as ever deserved that unassuming adjective.

And yet . . .

Three men passing hurriedly westward, their hats jammed on their heads, their faces set toward lunch, cast a quick sidelong glance of curiosity. And two of the three looked back. The elderly owner of the spats, umbrella still half furled, moved forward indiscreetly, his sunken eyes under their creased lids suddenly alight.

For there was about the lady an air that adorably matched the day, a subtle fragrance of youth, an appeal suggestive of the mystery of her sex rendered more provocative by her smiling unconcern. Obviously she had but one aim in view: to cross a wet pavement and enter the jeweller's shop. She glanced neither to right nor to left; her blue eyes swept the stream of passers-by merely to avoid them. Serene and busified she chose the exact moment and, with a quick swing of supple hips, head daintily erect, moved forward, and the portals of "Percy Edwards" swallowed her up.

Her cavalier was less indifferent. Angrily he surveyed the gentleman in spats and a quick colour stained his fair, boyish face, his sense of protection on the alert.

"That old beast Fitz!" he said to himself, with the clean distaste of triumphant youth for senile age that apes it.

"Buy a button 'ole, sir?" A flower-woman trailed by, a basket of violets on one arm, a shapeless bundle

gathered in the other. Something in the dewy fragrance of the rain-dashed flowers arrested the impatient rejoinder on his lips. He chose three bunches carefully and having overpaid the vendor in his desire to be swiftly rid of her was generously rewarded by the whining benediction of the streets.

Meanwhile within the shop the Inconspicuous Lady had moved down the long counter to the further end. By the door a tall, clean-shaven man was bending over a pearl pin, examining it with steady attention. Beyond him, lolling on anything that promised support, two youths, round-shouldered, with dull and spotty faces, were discussing with an appearance of utter indifference a trinket for a lady with a fancy name.

A suave individual, with pink hands and an air of perfect possession, moved forward to inquire the newcomer's desire.

"What can I shew you, moddam?"

"I want a wedding ring."

Her voice, low but clear, held a penetrating quality, and in the closed-in peacefulness of the shop after the noise without seemed peculiarly alive.

She raised a pair of calm blue eyes, without a shadow of embarrassment, to meet the slight and hastily veiled surprise on the shopman's face.

"Certainly, moddam."

It was not every day that a lady proffered such a request, accustomed as he was to nervous young men in a similar predicament and to the cultured indifference of elderly bridegrooms.

"Twenty-two carat, I presume, moddam?"

Seeing her slight hesitation he leaned forward confidentially.

"We *always* recommend it. In fact, we guarantee it—to *wear*."

"Indeed?" A smile flickered across her face, betraying the existence of a dimple near the sweet, curved mouth, and left it, swiftly, as though conscious of insubordination.

"Then twenty-two carat, please."

He produced a long tray lined with imperial purple, and set with those curiously simple links that outwardly bind two separate lives together.

Deliberately she unfastened the brown glove that covered her left hand.

The two youths nudged each other delightedly—oblivious of the trinkets set before them—in the excitement of the moment standing without help of stick or counter.

"By Gad—she's going to try it on!"

The taller of the pair, pretexting a sudden interest in a case of studs, moved perceptibly nearer. But his companion, without searching for excuse, calmly outstripped him. The man in the doorway raised his head, watching the manœuvre with a cold and disapproving eye. He had the square-jawed, thoughtful face of a certain type of American that is assuredly not of the "tourist" description; that hurried, loud-voiced "globe trotter," as closely representative of his nation as the long-toothed British spinster, dear to French caricaturists, is typical of hers.

In sweet unconsciousness of the attention she evoked the Inconspicuous Lady drew off her glove, removed from the third finger of her left hand a well-worn wedding ring, dropped it heedlessly into the brown bag, and, leaning forward with a business-like air, chose another from the collection before her.

As she did so she turned slightly from the shadowy corner where she stood and a ray of inquisitive sunshine fell across her copper hair and lighted up the oval of her face.

"Why, it's——!"

"Look out! She'll hear." For his friend, moved by a vestige of good taste, had checked the first youth's excited recognition.

And they both stared anew, utterly unashamed.

He raised a pair of keen grey eyes under fair eyebrows, thick and shaggy—a rarity in men other than dark—that somehow added to the quiet strength of the clean-shaven face.

"Can you show me others? I don't think much of this."

"It's one of the best pins we have, sir"—the shopman's voice was aggrieved—"when you get pearls that size it's difficult to find colour and shape too, unless," he rubbed his hands together, with a shrewd glance of valuation, "unless, sir, you are prepared to go to a fancy figure?"

"I don't think I mentioned price."

A glimmer of amusement played across the American's face. He did not really want the pin, but all his latent chivalry demanded that he should stay there, a formidable screen, to prevent a woman being badgered by a class of man he despised.

"We have here a fine black pearl, sir."

The other produced a brown morocco case with an added air of respect. But the American's quick ear had caught the click of an opening purse and a slight rustle of departure behind him.

Then the clear voice again.

"No, thanks; I'll take it just as it is," followed by a quick exclamation, the chink of metal falling upon the floor, and a tiny object rolled up against his boot. He hesitated for the fraction of a moment, as he saw the other shopman hastening forward.

Then he stooped, picked up the ring, and squarely faced the owner.

"Here it is," he said quietly, and laid it in a soft pink palm.

"Oh!—thank you . . ."

Her voice was abrupt, her face a little pale. But what hurt him in a curious, undefined way, as his grey eyes met the blue ones, was the look of trouble in their depths; again that slight shrinking, that one sees in the face of a frightened child.

Then suddenly, reassured by the steady quiet of his manner, she smiled. With a slight inclination of her head toward him, a hurried "Good-day" to the shopman, she moved across the space dividing her from the door, passed the still-staring youths with a touch of hauteur, and was gone.

But here further curiosity barred her course.

The gentleman in spats, loitering on the pavement, pressed forward eagerly.

"Ah . . . how d'ye do? Surely you haven't forgotten . . ."

He stopped perforce, chagrined by her coldly averted gaze, and the next moment her cavalier had roughly interposed, swept her with a strong arm into the taxi, growled: "Right ahead!" to the driver, and slammed the door behind his indignant back.

The chauffeur leaned sideways.

"Where to?" His voice expressed the thought that the "ways of these young nuts was past all bearing!"

"Where to?"

A whispered colloquy ensued.

"Tell him to stop at Albert Gate," said the lady wearily.

The boyish face came out of the window with a scowl.

"Right ahead—as I told you! I'll pull you up when I want to."

"Ho! Will yer?" said the chauffeur to the world at large. He hitched up the apron, gave a vicious tweak to the meter, with an eye on the dial, and they were off, running smoothly down one of London's few small hills.

The Inconspicuous Lady leaned back in the corner, her eyes half-closed, her face strained and white. Her cavalier, I regret to state, was whistling under his breath. It is certain his honest heart bled for her and his sympathy took the curious form of a selection from the latest waltz.

Meanwhile he watched her out of the corner of his eye.

"Must cheer her up," he said to himself. "What a damned unfair world it is!"

Music having failed, he fell back on the charm of conversation leavened by extreme flippancy.

"'Albert Gate'." He repeated their destination with a slight grimace. "It's a horrible name, isn't it? For a gate, too! There's such fascination about a gate—you never know where it may lead. But 'Albert'!—the gate of all the virtues, surely."

He stole another glance and caught her eye, deeply anxious in his boyish fashion to chase away the cloud that dimmed the beauty of her face.

"It's an odd thing now how suspicious we are as a nation," he rattled on. "This same Albert Gate, for instance. With all its historic virtue, we don't credit it! Not in the least. 'This gate is closed at night'. Mark that. It's an insult! An early Victorian, puritanic piece of red-tapeism!"

He paused for breath, and chuckled at the thought.

The lady stirred in her corner and echoed his laugh faintly.

"What nonsense you talk, boy! Why shouldn't they close it?"

"Why *shouldn't* they? Ye gods! Why, to let in lovers, of course. Into the nicest bit of all, with the white bridge and the rhododendrons and the dark water of the lake and an empty band-stand in case of rain, and . . . and the statue of Achilles to say, 'Bless you, my children.' It's an infamy and a shame, and drives people to sitting hand in hand under staring electroliers at Popular Concerts—that's why they're popular, I suppose. Let me do that."

For she was trying in vain to button the brown glove.

"The man who made the first glove was an Artist . . ."

He glanced up at her suddenly, trying to gauge her mood.

"Go on," she encouraged him, "that can't be all!"

"Don't hurry Genius! It's a mistake." He gave a little sigh of relief as she smiled back into his bright face.

"What a ridiculous little button! Why don't you

have those snappy things that say ‘thank you’ audibly when you press ’em? Well, to continue. He was an Artist and loved hands—those long, beautiful, Early-Italian hands, pale, passionate and boneless.”

“How horrible!” The lady shuddered.

“Not at all—entirely seductive. He clad them in embroidered and costly kid, carelessly sewn with pearls: to guard them from other men. That was the notion. It was monopoly flaunting as an art. In those days hands were kissed. It’s a pretty habit—I do it myself—to the very young and the very old.”

“Why?” She watched him with amused blue eyes, content to be drawn from her own sad thoughts.

“The old take it for reverence, and the young . . . well, the young are frankly tickled! But, to continue: this simple form of salute lands naturally on the back of the hand, the placid plateau between knuckle and wrist. And devilish uncomfortable it must have been to get a mouthful of seed pearls . . .” He pondered upon it whimsically, rewarded by her laugh. “Now, this is where the artistry came in. The place really to kiss a hand——” He stole a quick, mischievous glance at her, fastened the last button, and laid the member in question gently back upon her knee: “Observe my stupendous renunciation! . . . is exactly where the original genius has left an opening, a divine . . . Albert Gate, straight and narrow as all Alberts are, and impossible for navigation without the lady’s consent. Except, of course, by brute force! You can’t assign any other reason for that adorable oasis in the desert of kid. It’s not for air, it can’t

be for economy, it's a bare-faced apology for love-making . . . I think we had better talk of something else," he concluded primly.

Her laugh rang our clear and irresistible; like the Spring mood itself she swept from tears to sunshine.

"I think you would have done excellently, boy, in those Early-Italian days . . ."

"With a hawk on my wrist and a roving eye and a charger that caracoled, page to some desperate prince of a Cardinal, or secretary, shall we say, to Boccaccio himself?—inscribing delicately on parchment his most indelicate romances! Forgive me!" He caught her slight frown: "It's the Spring, or snow in the air, or perhaps the fact that being merely mortal I am sorely in need of lunch, and this leads me into a forced and desperate gaiety."

"You poor boy! I'd forgotten lunch. It must be getting late; but I am so anxious just to do one thing more . . ."

The narrowing of the road announced Knightsbridge.

"And here we are at the Gate—stop him, quick!—he's going past!"

He thrust his head out of the window and shouted lustily. But all in vain. Secure and stolid the chauffeur never turned.

On they went, threading their way in and out of the confused traffic, past the Hyde Park Hotel, and ever "straight ahead".

By Knightsbridge Barracks a policeman barred the way.

"Fare wanter stop," he announced magisterially.

"Look here," said the lady's cavalier, as they descended with indignant haste, "I've been *shouting* at you ever since Albert Gate!"

"Sorry, sir," the chauffeur smiled, "you said you'd pull me up, and I'm a bit 'ard o' 'earing these days. Thankye, sir." He counted over the money and, noting good fare, relented and offered to drive them back, but they started briskly to retrace their steps, regardless of his condescension. Seeing which, he pursued conclusions to himself.

"Right a'ead, 'e sez—I'll pull yer up when I wants ter . . ." Then, with sudden gusto:

"Lord! but 'ee knows a pretty face!"

And, with this tribute to the Inconspicuous Lady's charms, slewed round and was off, still grinning, westward.

CHAPTER II

To the white bridge hanging over the still water—commended by Boris Majendie to the contemplation of lovers—the lady led the way, accompanied by that hungry altruist, still gallantly “holding out”.

Arrived there, she halted, silent and preoccupied, gave a swift glance around her, opened the small bag, and, after some probing in its mysterious depths, produced a round object muffled in tissue paper, the size perhaps of a shilling piece.

“I want you——” She hesitated, turning to Majendie, who was surveying her movements with an air of genial perplexity, “I want you to throw this away. Right out into the water there, as far as ever you can.”

She pointed with an emphatic wave of her hand to the shining Serpentine, where a vast concourse of waterfowl were busy making ripples in the clear surface that mirrored the fleecy sky.

“Supposing it slays a duck? Is there a legal penalty?”

But he took the object from her and, stepping back, with a swing of his long arm sped the missile. It flew straight, unwrapping itself in transit. There was a gleam of gold in the sunshine; then it cut the

water and vanished, leaving a widening circle to mark its disappearance.

The Inconspicuous Lady drew a deep sigh of relief. For a moment longer she stood there, lost in thought, her blue eyes fixed beyond the belt of trees, as though she saw the ghosts of dead days pass, slaves to that symbol she had cast away.

Then the tension of her face relaxed. She gave herself a little shake and glanced around her like a sleeper awakening; and again the radiance of the hour and the full beauty of the Spring stirred with its song of youth against the closed gates of her heart.

"And now . . ." She turned to the boy beside her with a smile.

"Lunch," he responded promptly, "and blessed be the man who built the Hyde Park Hotel! My dear, you'll faint if you don't have something soon."

His voice softened as he spoke, and he slipped a hand through her arm, suddenly divining the significance of the mysterious errand.

She looked up at him gratefully: at the smooth, boyish face, with its kindly brown eyes, its large, firmly modeled mouth, and clean-cut look of youth.

"A woman would have asked a hundred questions by now"—they fell into step together,—“that's the best of a man! And, just because you haven't, I've half a mind . . .”

But he checked her quickly, his chivalry aroused.

"Please don't! I believe . . . I understand." The

colour stole up under his fair skin, and he cleared his voice nervously.

"Only I'd like to think, somehow, that you've thrown your pack of worries away, every man jack of them, along with that . . . death to ducks!"

She gave the hand within her arm a little pat of affection and gratitude.

"My dear boy—I *really* mean to. Indeed I do! But to-day has been a winding-up of matrimonial accounts." A tinge of bitterness lay in the final words. "And now it's over, signed and sealed. It was very absurd of me to mind, but that horrid old man and his impertinence seemed the last straw. How *dared* he?"

Her eyes flashed and she straightened her slim shoulders with an air of desperate pride.

"Why should I suffer for another's sins? The law of England is an insult to womanhood!"

Majendie nodded, his face grimly set. "It does seem a bit one-sided, I'll admit. Still it has its uses," he tried to turn her thoughts into a happier channel, "and its ornaments." He gave a deprecating little cough.

"You absurd person!" She smiled again. "I quite forgot you were a budding barrister."

"Briefless an blessed, but a credit to the profession."

"And a very true friend. No, don't be alarmed! I'm not getting sentimental or . . . stupid again. From to-day you will see I'm going to start afresh: to enjoy, at last, a glorious independence. I'm going

to be an adventuress, Boris, something desperate and unconventional!" Her laugh rang out gayly, mischief glowed in her eyes.

"No more 'truckling under' to people and opinions. I shall think and act for myself, walk boldly through all the Albert Gates, night and day!"

"Well—don't blame me if you get run in," he suggested comfortably, "and, after all, it's the height of fashion now and comparatively easy and inexpensive. A tenpenny hammer and the nearest window—*Evviva Vine Street!* and *O the Glory and the Martyrdom.*"

But, although she smiled, she was far away on the old train of thought.

"That's why I bought a new wedding-ring." She caught his look of amazement. "Yes, I did, just now, at Percy Edwards'. It's a pledge from me to myself, you see, besides being a useful commodity in my scheme of independence. Twenty-two carat gold! I wish you had seen the shopman's face. '*The best gold, moddam, we guarantee it to wear.*' Oh, it was delicious, and he looked so shocked when I tried it on."

Majendie roared.

"Perhaps he saw me through the door, hanging about wistfully with violets in my hand, which, bye-the-bye, we've left in that confounded taxi! He'd think you had kidnapped me. '*Poor young fellow*', he'd say. I know I was pale and wan, fighting the pangs of hunger like a man."

He chuckled again, moved with joy at the picture.

"Yes, he undoubtedly took me for a cowed bridegroom."

"I must say those gloves of yours have a bridal look." She pointed to the vast expanse of chamois—"it's a pity they're not 'sewn with seed pearls'—what was the phrase exactly, about early-Italian hands?"

He held back the swinging door of the Grill Room entrance for her to pass in.

"'Pale, passionate and boneless' was, I fancy, the priceless description—and that suggests 'Sole Colbert'. Will that suit your ladyship? Let's get that table in the window."

They settled themselves in the pleasant low room, deserted save by an elderly pair likewise late for lunch. The Inconspicuous Lady glanced around her with interest.

"It's the first time I've been here—in the Grill Room, I mean. How nice and restful it is!—I like these plain panelled walls. One gets so tired of eating to the accompaniment of white and gold and Rose Dubarry. Is this a special haunt of yours?"

"More or less. What will you drink?" He turned over the wine list with due solemnity, but she checked him with a quick gesture.

"Water, please," and added, heedless of his pained remonstrance:

"I'm afraid I'm that peculiarly uninteresting character, a teetotaller."

He shuddered openly at the word.

"Do you object to my having whiskey?"

"Well, I won't make an actual scene."

She drew off her gloves and, leaning forward, continued apologetically:

"You know—it's a fad of mine—I've told you before."

"A most injurious fad," he retorted, "a pernicious form of martyrdom. 'Take a little wine, *pour l'amour de l'estomac*'—don't blush!—it's quite correct in French, merely an airy way of alluding to the digestion."

He turned to the waiter.

"One whiskey and a large Perrier."

That worthy repeated the order sadly, and withdrew, nose in air.

"Observe the wounded feelings of our friend. He thought better of you. 'Perrier Jouet,' he murmured, the moment you stepped into the room—instead of which," he made a grimace, "you order Perrier plain!"

He leaned forward, his elbows on the table, and surveyed his companion with an appreciative eye.

"Nevertheless you look somewhat un-Londonlike to-day."

"That's because I'm going into the country."

She glanced at a tiny watch she wore, a round ball set in brilliants, suspended from a delicate platinum chain.

"So we mustn't dawdle too long, I'm afraid—pleasant as it is."

"Where are you going? Or, I should like to say, where are *we* going this sunny afternoon?"

"I really don't know."

She laughed outright at his puzzled face, then, with a charming irrelevance,

"How old are you, boy?"

"Twenty-four and a half; 'coming twenty-five,' as the children say. May I ask the reason of this indiscreet curiosity?"

"I wasn't quite sure. I guessed you somewhere about that golden age. 'Coming twenty-five'." She gave a little sigh. "I wish I could say the same."

"Well, you're hardly an octogenarian yourself! Don't contradict me. I've looked you up in Burke. Yes, I know it was mean, but I had to . . ." He grew suddenly red. "Oh! I can't explain—and it sounds—unutterable."

She smiled at him kindly.

"I quite understand—the grim finger of the Law! But to return to the main point . . ."

"Perhaps you imagine I can travel on a half-ticket?" he interrupted, "or as an infant in arms . . . it sounds rather pleasing, now I come to think of it."

"Hardly. But I was wondering if you were still young enough to confide in without offering valuable advice in return—the inevitable cold douche of disapproval that experience turns on to any unconventional scheme."

"What desperate deed are you contemplating? Hurrah! Here's the sole."

The sad-faced waiter waved it under his eyes and removed it for dissection with an air of chilly forbearance, and they waited for his departure before continuing the subject.

"Now," he gave a sigh of relief, "I'm all agog—whatever that means—do tell me."

"Well—I've thought the whole thing out, this last detestable week——" She broke off suddenly, looking up at her companion.

"It is absolutely between ourselves, you understand, Boris?"

"My dear lady," his voice was slightly aggrieved, "if you can't trust me . . ."

Her hand was stretched impulsively across the narrow table.

"I didn't mean that—forgive me. It's only I'm so desperately afraid of people finding out where I am. The fact is"—she laughed a shade nervously—"I'm going to disappear!"

He looked up, startled by the word, and she went on hurriedly.

"It's the only way—anyhow for the next six months—until . . . everything's definite, you understand? So it's no good your shaking your head at me, or saying it's absurd, or mad, or impossible or improper! I'm just going to do it." She smiled, a little air of defiance on the beautiful, warm-toned face.

"Not here, at this table, I hope? Picture my feelings, left with the remains of the sole and an empty chair!"

"Now, *do* be serious for once," she frowned at him, "or you won't hear anything more."

"Fancy the waiter's face: 'You ordered asparagus for TWO, Sir—we can't possibly make any reduc-

tion!" Do hold out until the coffee. There! I'm sorry. I won't be frivolous again. Only—" he paused, his brown eyes full of affection—"it's just so good to be sitting here with you, talking any nonsense. It's so rarely I get you all to myself. Confound that waiter, he's coming back!"

"To see if I'm still here, I suppose." She gave a little gurgle of mirth; there was no resisting the infection of his mood.

"Sauce mousseline, Sir, with the asparagus?"

"Yes, yes," said Majendie impatiently—and added "For TWO." They laughed together. The waiter thought them mad.

"And a rum-omelette to follow—" He called after the man, as he creaked away, disapproval oozing from his very boots. "Just to see what your teetotal fad is really worth."

"You'll have to eat it yourself. I'm not to be led astray!— Besides I hate rum, although I'm a sailor's daughter."

"I suppose the Admiral took his 'noggin' a day?— though I must confess I'm hazy on nautical matters, my knowledge being mostly gleaned from 'what the Night Watchman said' in Jacobs' delightful books."

"They *are* nice—full of unexpected laughter-traps."

"But not so thrilling as the story I am waiting to hear," he insinuated gently.

"The great disappearance, you mean? Well, this is the main idea. I've refused all kind invitations from my few broad-minded relatives—including the

suggestion of a Catholic aunt to enter a convent for life—stored my household goods and dismissed the servants. All save Louise, who leaves to-night with the bulk of my luggage for Paris. You will see in to-morrow's paper that I have gone on a Continental tour and to give it an air of reality I've engaged rooms at the Meurice, where I am supposed by Louise to join her almost immediately. As a matter of fact she'll enjoy a week by herself looking up old friends and gloating over the shops. Meanwhile I disappear."

"But whither, fair lady? and why, and with whom? And what is to become of the unfortunate Louise at the end of the week?"

"Oh—that's easy enough. She will be sent on to Germaine, my old school friend in the Vosges. You met her I think last year with us on the River? She happens to want a maid and it's a lovely place. Louise will be in clover—French clover too! She is always grumbling at England and English ways. The puzzle is exactly where I am to go. I've thought of so many places, but there's always some flaw in the scheme."

"Let's get an A. B. C. and work it out methodically."

"The very thing—what a brain you have!" So she mocked him. Then from gay flashed to serious attention.

"And, after all, why not? There's a subtle fascination in leaving things to chance." She gazed past him through the window and across the busy

thoroughfare to the colour scheme of Wooland's. The dust swirled up under the whirl of taxi, victoria and lumbering bus and a sudden distaste for London and the feverish movement of town invaded her tired spirit and over-strained nerves.

"I want to get away—out of all this," she gave an impatient sigh, "into the country of green leaves, stupid faces and kind hearts."

"Must they always go together?" But his voice was gentle and as she made no response he called the waiter and asked for the time-table to be brought.

The yellow, paper-covered book was duly laid before her and she roused herself from her momentary abstraction.

"Now"—her voice was gay—"observe how we consult the oracle."

From the neat black toque she drew a murderous-looking pin. Then she closed her eyes, drove it firmly into the massed leaves, felt for the page indicated, looked down eagerly and together they peered where the point of the pin had transfixed the printed matter.

"Coddell-in-the-Dale." She spelled it out. "Impossible!—there can't be such a place." Her eyes shone with amusement.

"Coddell-in-the-Dale it is!" Majendie echoed the words. "What a delicious name. So comfortable and homely. Fancy writing to invite your friends: 'Come and be coddled!'—what a mercy it's an 'o' and not a 'u'!"

But she heeded him not, absorbed in the great discovery.

"It's on the Great Central, in the Midlands. See Coddell Junction—page 99." She turned the leaves hurriedly.

"Here you are!—There's a train at 3.40 arriving 5.12. I could catch that easily. Couldn't I? And it's new country to me, right off the beaten track."

She leaned back in her chair with a little sigh of relief.

"I shall go there," she declared, "this afternoon."

He looked at her thoughtfully, considering the scheme, conscious anew of the tired lines of her face.

"It might be an awful hole, and you don't get there much before dusk—just coal-pits perhaps, or a dreary common with a handful of cottages and no inn. Why not leave it until the morning? You're not really rushed for time."

Her face fell at this unexpected lack of enthusiasm; seeing which he added hastily, "I don't want to be a wet-blanket you know and it may be exquisitely Arcadian with a snug little inn and a rose-covered porch and a winding road up a hill to a Church with a Norman tower. But on the other hand there's the coal-pit theory and the barren common and despair."

"Impossible—with a name like that. Besides I could always go on to the nearest town—" Her mouth was obstinately set.

"Well, then, if you've quite made up your mind I shall come with you—you shan't go alone. No, it's no use looking haughty and annoyed. It's a free

country and I've as good a right to travel on the Great Central to Coddell-in-the-Dale as yourself—even if I *am* dismissed into the next carriage! It's absurd your running the risk of being stranded in some God-forsaken spot in the heart of the country without a roof to cover you."

"There's always the railway station," she retorted. "And I'm used to taking care of myself. It's a bye-law of the married state." Again the cloud gathered over her candid face. "It's very kind of you to suggest protection but the days of the highwayman are mercifully over."

"Leaving a loophole for the tramp." Majendie's voice was dry, "and elderly gentlemen in white spats. It's no use, Petronilla, I'm coming—a limpet—a nuisance—anything you like, but there, a solid fact."

He glanced down at the open time-table. "There's a train back at ten I can catch, after seeing you safely bestowed for the night. Of course, it would be pleasanter—far pleasanter"—he sighed—"if instead of that cold air of disapproval you would welcome your humble escort and we could trot off like two children playing truant together . . ."

He saw her waver and followed up his advantage skilfully.

"But I suppose you think it's your own box of bricks and I've no right to meddle with it—besides being a babe in arms and addicted to strong liquor."

At this she laughed.

"A very precocious babe! Well, I give in—all-

though it's a poor beginning for my scheme of independence."

"Not at all," said her companion gaily. "The very reverse! You snap your fingers in the teeth of society and Percy Edwards is justified of his suspicions. To Coddell-in-the-Dale"—he raised his glass—"it has all the merits of a first-class elopement."

CHAPTER III

BEHIND the veil of superficial resemblance that all large stations bear, due to the noise of many engines, the grime of smoke and coal dust, and the perpetual movement of hurrying humanity, each of the great London Termini hides an individual soul—a personality peculiar and apart that holds no secret to the man who has taught himself to observe.

For observation is rarely a gift of the gods. It is the outcome of a habit of concentration, a meticulous probing into cause and effect that seeks everywhere an answer to the enigma of life.

Thus, to the ‘eyes that see,’ Charing Cross, that gateway of the short cut to Europe, is Continental at heart, with its ‘Customs’—where lurks the acrid smell of harbours—its polyglot speech and crowded Boat-trains: there is no gainsaying its cosmopolitan appeal.

Waterloo has a grimmer spirit. Soldiers and sailors with bundled belongings add to the historic name a far-off menace of war; a faint cloud of danger coming from the coast and presaging the storm when busy streams of armed men shall pour southward to the defence of the Island that dreamed herself impregnable.

But Paddington is restful, striking the note of West

Country ways. Soft-spoken guards wear a protective air with that gentle blend of deference and easy familiarity towards 'the Gentry' that is missing in the North and suggests men born and bred on quiet estates, self-respecting and proud, yet acknowledging the ancient laws of Caste.

The Great Central alone, youngest babe of the metropolis, is undeveloped yet, greeting the attentive tourist with an air of mild surprise. It has not found itself. There is a sleepy provincial atmosphere hanging under its ultra-modern roof, and the very entrance to it lacks dignity and suggests a furtive attempt to evade observation, crouching behind the huge block of the Great Central Hotel.

On this particular May afternoon, a drowsy haze blurred the high rafters and spread, streaked by a fan of sunshine, down to the hot platform as Majendie and his companion, avoiding the few and solitary passengers, took possession of an empty carriage in the centre of the train.

In their desire to run no risk of 'cutting it fine' (allowing for the lengthened ride that a call at her hotel necessitated) they found themselves with ten minutes to spare; and having carefully bestowed beneath the seat the suit case, holding those few belongings the Inconspicuous Lady deemed suitable to the adventure, they now proceeded to pace up and down the platform in the aimless fashion of the Britisher in his sub-conscious Religion of Exercise.

For you can mark an Englishman by this very trait in any station abroad, wending his way with steady

intention, in and out of the gossiping groups of foreigners, standing, sitting, leaning, where the islander is ever for movement. Whether it be the knowledge to which he is born of the boundary line of water—that walk where he may the blue ocean somewhere must end his pilgrimage; or whether the quarter-deck habit prevails in a nation that once governed the seas and still continues to confuse ‘safety’ with ‘tradition’; whatever the latent cause of the restlessness may be, this desire to walk anywhere for the mere sake of walking belongs to no other people on earth and holds the sanctity of a rite.

Given an empty space and five minutes of leisure, the Englishman stolidly proceeds, without reasoning, moved by this mysterious impulse, to encourage the boot trade at the expense of his purse.

“Let us walk up and down and get a little air,” was therefore Majendie’s suggestion and, the lady acquiescing, they fell into step together, moving instinctively towards the open end of the long glass-roofed tunnel.

It was mid-way in their peregrinations that a new idea dawned on the lady’s cavalier.

“You’ve forgotten a somewhat important point,” he hastened to inform her, “wherever you go, even to a Coddell-in-the-Dale, your name will give you away. You must have an adopted one, a suitable nom de guerre.”

She nodded her head wisely.

“I’ve thought of that already. Why not be ‘Mrs. Brown’?”

“Because you don’t look it, my dear.” He laughed

aloud at the thought. “ ‘Mrs. Brown, from no-where in particular, who has seen better days!’ It’s too obviously ridiculous—and who wears a watch studded with diamonds and irreproachable boots. Boots, by the way, are the surest index to a person’s means. Now there’s a certain air about your boots . . . a Russian-leather air, that doesn’t suggest ‘Brown.’ ”

“But that’s just what they are,” she retorted gaily, “plain brown boots.” She glanced with a pardonable touch of vanity at her well-shod feet. “Still, I give in!—it’s not a pretty name.”

They came to a halt instinctively before the book-stall where the small boy in charge was whiling away the hour by an attentive perusal of “Scraps.” Three rows of ancient library books fringed the edge of the stall bearing the alluring headings: “Price, one shilling”—“Ninepence each”—and the tattered waifs of the collection—“This row, sixpence.”

“One could choose the title of a book,” said the Inconspicuous Lady. She glanced carelessly at the covers. “I think we’ll leave it to chance again and see what comes of it. You watch and I’ll point out some at random.”

She closed her eyes tightly, touching one row after another in succession with her finger.

“Now?” She turned to Majendie. Over the edge of his paper the newsboy gazed suspiciously at the performance.

“‘Young April’ by Egerton Castle: and the next ‘Peter Pan’”—Majendie stooped to read the soiled lettering on the book below—“‘The Hazard of a

Die' . . ." he gave a little grimace. "Ye Gods—what a selection!"

She repeated the names after him, her brows knit in thought. The boy sidled down from his perch on the high stool, scenting a would-be customer.

"Wanter book, lidy?"

He dusted the shilling row with an ingenious sweep of his sleeve.

"All the litest books," he informed her unblushingly.

"You little scamp," said Majendie. "They were written before the Flood."

The boy caught the twinkle in his eye and sniggered.

"It's a cheap lot, sir, any'ow," he amended.

He took down tentatively a sporting novel, bound in a violent yellow.

But at this moment an exclamation from the lady startled them both.

"I have it!" She turned to Majendie, her face aglow. "April Panhasard—there's a delicious name!"

Then, conscious of the boy's inquisitive gaze, she moved away from the bookstall.

Majendie tossed him a sixpence and followed.

"Don't you like it? It combines all three titles, is quaint and musical. 'April Panhasard'"—she lingered on the word—"Mrs. Panhasard of Coddell-in-the-Dale."

"Charming." Majendie approved—"especially the April. Although I am loth to part with Petronilla,

the new name suits you well—‘an April lady, all sweet smiles and tears’ . . .”

“I don’t see why one shouldn’t be called April as well as May?—and I once knew a girl called June,” she looked up at him and added whimsically, “though it would take a brave woman to call her daughter ‘September’!”

The ticket-collector approached, banging and snapping his way down the half-empty train, and they climbed into their places under his admonishing gaze.

“Take your seats, please.”

The engine backed out slowly, a country cousin bowing low before the royalty of Town, and a sudden shower of rain lashed the windows of the carriage, blurring the grey outlines of roof and chimney and blackened railroad walls.

“I feel like the Owl and the Pussycat going to Sea,” said the boy lazily.

He pulled out the corner of the suit case for her to rest her feet upon and produced an evening paper which he handed across.

“Now you snuggle back into that corner and have a rest. I know you’re one of those sensible people who never talk in trains.”

“What a deliberate hint,” she laughed back at him —“well, go to sleep, Owl, and I’ll mind the Pea-green Boat.”

A glint of sunshine fell athwart the shower as they whirled through a suburban station and came out on to green fields beyond. She peered through the open window, breathing in deeply the rain-washed air,

"Good-bye, London." Her voice was low and, although her lips smiled, her eyes were sad. Majendie watched her through half-closed lids with a man's appreciation of the moment for silence.

She put up her hands to her head and removed her hat, with a little sigh of relief as the wind played with her radiant hair.

"That's better! I'm sorry to be so restless, dear Owl, but I shall settle down soon. It's nice to think we're going into the heart of the country where gloves and hats and finery are reserved for Sunday Church."

"Yes, I don't suppose they wear them round the coal-pits," he suggested mischievously.

"I *wish* you'd go to sleep."

"So I will," he closed his eyes, "if you promise not to take advantage of my unprotected condition," he added drowsily, with the daring of old friendship.

But her thoughts had wandered off again and she sat there silent, her chin cupped in her ungloved hand, where the new wedding-ring gleamed, conspicuously golden.

He could see the clear profile outlined against the light, the droop of the slim shoulders, the supple curve of her breast in the plain serge coat; and at the whole sweet picture of graceful womanhood a sudden thought made his young mouth hard, sent a thrill of that fighting spirit through his veins, that still stirs English manhood at the thought of a woman wronged.

"It's jolly unfair"—he said to himself—"the whole dirty business—— Damn the chap! I'd like to get him to myself for a quiet half-hour one day . . ."

And in the pleasing picture it evoked, fell back on memories of other 'quiet half-hours,' his hand stealing instinctively to an old cut on his lip.

With a smothered chuckle, his head drooped an inch, nodded, gave a sudden jerk with the train, nodded again and he fell asleep.

"Coddell Junction," said a harsh voice in his ears. "Change 'ere for Swathem, Easterlip and Slingsby-on-the-'ill!"

A light touch on his knee and the smiling face of April Panhasard, once more hatted, gloved, alert, rose through the mists of slumber.

"Wake up, boy—we're here!"

"Gracious me, I believe I've been asleep!"

"Just a nap," she said cheerily—"pull out that bag first and we'll discuss the marvel later."

"I'm awfully sorry—" he caught up his hat and stick, dragged the suit-case forth and was on the platform beside her.

A small boy in a sailor suit ran past them, crying joyfully:

"There he is!—There's Skipper!" And a deep voice answered:

"Hullo! Bosun—mind that rod now—or you'll break it," as a man swung out of the adjoining carriage, blue-eyed with a short beard, and bronzed serious face.

"Well, Candida, my dear"—as a fair-haired woman joined them—"is the car here? You got my wire all right?" He took off his hat and kissed her gravely.

Meanwhile the youngster had seized upon his bag

and was dragging it sturdily along, on short excited legs, brown as a berry where the white socks ended, showing bare knees beneath the diminutive knicker-bockers.

The speaker had recovered the endangered fishing-rod and, slipping a hand through his wife's arm, made for the gate leading out of the country station.

The ticket-collector touched his cap respectfully.

"Good day, Sir, nice weather, sir." He held the wicket open. "Tickets, please," as Majendie and his companion followed.

Beyond lay the bare grey road and a dusty patch of yard, innocent of vehicles.

"How does one get to Coddell-in-the-Dale?" April asked.

"And how far is it?" supplemented Majendie.

"A good walk from 'ere, sir," said the man addressed, "nigh on five mile it be."

"Phew . . .!" Majendie paused, dismayed—"no cabs either!" he glanced up and down the road.

"Not unless you've ordered one, sir." The man scratched his head. "There's a carrier as meets the *morning* train . . ." he suggested cheerfully, and closed the wicket behind them.

In the shadow of the hedge stood a big Rolls Royce, apparently for the convenience of an agitated fox terrier who was jumping up and down in wild excitement as the little group before them drew near to him.

"D'you mean I can't get a cab, or a cart or anything to take us there?"

Majendie hunted for a shilling and spoke ingratiatingly.

But the ticket-collector shook his head and the pair stared blankly at each other, then at the suit case between them.

The man with the fishing-rod glanced back, hesitated, and, seeing the strangers' dilemma, consulted his wife and returned.

"D'you want to get to Coddell-in-the-Dale?" His voice was brusque and a slight colour under his bronze skin betrayed an inherent shyness.

"Yes," said Majendie eagerly, "but there seems a difficulty. We had no idea"—he smiled involuntarily—"that it would be so far from the station."

A sudden memory of the coal-pits assailed him and the smile broadened on his face. "Is there no chance of a cab? By wiring somewhere?"

"I'm afraid not. This is quite the wilds," the other unthawed—"but—if you care for it—that is—my wife thought"—he stammered a little—"we've got the car here and if you don't mind a bit of a crush, we should be pleased to give you a lift."

"How *very* kind!" April turned impulsively towards him. She liked the look of the shy man with the deep grave voice. "If you are sure we shall not be too much of a load?"—she glanced at Majendie—"we could leave the bag behind—anywhere—for the promised 'morning carrier!'"

They all laughed, relieved that the strain was broken by a jest.

The boy in the sailor suit came running back.

"Do come," he cried, "she's a beauty—goes like fun!" He danced up and down, his dark, gipsy face surveying this gift of the gods—new friends neatly dropped from the skies—with obvious approval. "I'm learning to drive her myself," he confided gaily, "Darling lets me when the road's clear and there are no turns, you know, and yesterday . . ."

"Sh . . .!" the owner of the car checked him, "that'll do, Bosun. It's decided then, you'll come."

And they all crossed the road together, to where the fair-haired woman was ensconsed next the driving seat, the terrier on her lap.

"My name's Newcomen," he said stiffly, and checked the boy again, who was swarming up regardless of the guests.

"This is my wife——"

The bluest eyes she had ever seen met April Panhasard's gaze, not the aqua-marine colour of her own, but china-blue, clear and innocent as a child's, under a lavender motor-bonnet that framed rebellious curls, golden as corn in harvest-time.

"I'm so glad we can give you a lift," Newcomen's wife said, leaning forward with a pretty hospitality. "But I hope you won't be crushed, with my little boy behind. I'm afraid to have him here in this twisting road—he gets in the way of the steering. You must sit very quiet, Bosun, and be a good boy."

"I love children," said April simply, moved by the strange appeal of the blue, blue eyes. A spark of understanding leaped and quickened between them, the mysterious glow that foretells friendship, piercing

the guard of sex-mistrust that divides so many women.

"The bag can go here," said the man called Skipper. He strapped it on neatly with the deft fingers of the sailor, tucked the rug round his guests and started the engine going.

"You all right?" he turned his head for a final glance at the trio.

"All aboard the lugger," cried the small boy lustily — "right ahead, sir," and they were off.

High hedge and field flashed past them and the first fine exhilaration of the clear air in their teeth held them in a silence full of swift delight.

The little boy, wedged between them, stared straight ahead, braced to resist the breeze, his short legs dangling, mindful of the injunction—hard to obey—to be both quiet and good.

Majendie glanced at him sideways and shifted his position so that the fragile shoulders could lean against his arm.

"That better?—you sit tight and then we won't fall out round the corners. Lord, what a curve!" As the car swung easily in and out of the bending road.

"Isn't it *fine*?" April leaned closer to murmur in his ear. "I told you it would be a dream of a place but I never expected this."

For they had come to the crest of the winding hill. Below them lay the valley in a flood of amber light. A thread of silver water cut the long sweep of the dale, its green meadows and darker woods, with here and there an orchard where a red roof peeped, flanked

by hay-stacks and brown tilled soil, a pastoral romance.

And away on the further slope, through the blue haze that distance lent, smooth hills appeared, the manifold breasts of Mother Earth, calling ever her tired children to come and rest—and rest—and be rocked to sleep.

April Panhasard's eyes slowly filled with tears. The beauty of it, the exquisite repose, the very rain-drops that fell from the wet trees above as they darted forward and down to the promised land, seemed to wash away all the sin and suffering of mankind; to renew the tired spirit within, breathing at last of peace.

She came to herself with a start to find the child's gaze fixed upon her face, to feel a little hand laid upon her knee.

"Is it going too fast?" His voice was that of an anxious host. "The brake's all right, you know—Skipper keeps his foot on it."

"Not a bit"—she smiled back at him bravely—"it's just lovely." But he persisted gently with a child's want of tact: "You ought to wear goggles. Darling does often—when the wind's high, you know, it *does* hurt one's eyes."

"That's it," April laughed—"it's the wind in my eyes, my dear, just blowing away all the dirt and smoke of town."

"I know," said the boy gravely, as the car slackened speed—"it's a horrid place, London—'cept the Zoo."

A gust over the tree-tops dislodged his sailor's cap, which fell back to be caught in a sudden clutch by Majendie.

"Got him!" he cried gaily—"that was a near shave." He read the name on the band. "H. M. S. Swiftsure" . . . and handed it to its owner.

"That's Skipper's ship—his last," the Bosun explained. "He's a Captain, you know," a tinge of pride appeared—"and got three medals and a lot of little ribbon things—I can't r'ember the names."

"Your father?"—Majendie made a gesture towards the man in the driving seat.

"No." A curious look of obstinacy came into the child's expression.

"My father's dead," and his lips shut tightly.

"But that's your mother?" April Panhasard asked.

The dark, gipsy face was turned towards her, warm with a love transparently displayed.

"Yes, that's Darling." He gave a little nod, shaking the dark curls back as the wind rioted across them.

And she noticed with a curious wonder that above the left temple shone a lock purely white as though a finger had lain for a moment across his brow, marking him out from among the common crowd and leaving an indelible sign, a birthright that none might doubt.

"You see that church tower," he leaned forward, a small arm outstretched, "that's Coddell—our village, you know—and our house is just beyond, round the curve, and that white patch is the 'Admiral Rodney'"—his voice rose excitedly—"and that little dot

right away across the fields, with the twisty path—that little dot of red—that's the Kennels—where Joe lives!"

The car raced up a short stone bridge built in a curve such as the Romans loved, and leaped with a sudden throb down the further slope, nearly unseating the speaker. Majendie's arm tightened about him as they gazed eagerly ahead.

Now the first cottage came in sight round a clump of elms, as they raced onwards.

"By Jove," Majendie laughed aloud. "You were right, Petronilla—absurdly right!"

He waved his hand as the big Rolls Royce effortless started to climb.

"'Exquisitely Arcadian,'" he quoted, turning to watch her eager face, "'a winding road up a hill to a Church with a Norman tower—with a snug little Inn and a rose-covered porch . . .'"

Newcomen turned his head.

"This is Coddell-in-the-Dale," he explained. "Where shall we put you down?"

CHAPTER IV

IN truth it was Arcadian, without a shadow of doubt. Even bad butter could not mar their enthusiasm as they sat together in the stuffy little parlour of the "Admiral Rodney", facing a brown tea-pot filled with a brew of tea so strong and bitter that, as Majendie said, it "looked explosive".

Through the low window they could see a cottage garden across the dusty road; stocks and pinks and purple pansies rioting against a background of grey-green cabbage leaves flanked by a row of fresh young peas; and beyond the low eaves a chestnut, heavy with bloom, shaded the village well. In the middle of the road a dusty retriever slept, confident in a Providence that could turn traffic aside, and under the green porch, an Ancient of the village sucked at an empty pipe, staring placidly into space, a part and parcel of the rough brown bench.

"And now to business." April Panhasard ate the last radish and rose to her feet, straightening her hat with a glance at the speckled mirror in the empty space accorded by two china dogs, spotted miraculously with red and suggesting some obscure and virulent disease.

"I think we must go to the post office first. It usually contains the master mind of the village. And,

by the way, let me remind you that I am no longer 'Petronilla,' but 'Mrs. Panhasard,'" she gave a low laugh of enjoyment, "from nowhere in particular, who has seen better days!"

"Shall we pay for the gunpowder tea?"

He opened the door and gazed down the dark passage devoid of life.

"There seems to be no one about. I think they'll trust us until the dinner-hour. There's my bag, you see, as a pledge, in that hot little bedroom above. I wonder why they live with their windows hermetically sealed?"

"To enjoy the air when they walk abroad," Majendie suggested, as they passed out through the porch with its solitary occupant, who eyed them with the veiled stare of the very old.

The Church clock tolled out six deep notes, vibrating ceaselessly in the square tower, and a cool breeze sprang up as though in answer to the evening call.

"Isn't it delicious?" Majendie bared his head. "Up the hill, I should say, is our way. Why, there's another Inn—the 'Red Cow'—just look at the sign-board!—not quite so high-class as ours but suggestive of noble thirst."

A man with a blue mug in his hand lounged in the doorway.

"Can you tell us where the post office is to be found?" he inquired of that worthy, who passing his hand slowly across his mouth proceeded to reply obviously surprised at the strangers' ignorance.

"'Oop t' road, sir, nex' door to t' baker's shop," he

gave a jerk of his elbow in the direction of the Church, "ye can't miss it," he added consolingly.

"That's a mercy," said Majendie aside. "Everything seems extremely straightforward in Arcadia."

They toiled up the steep hill, gazing about them with the air of two explorers; passing the village well with its bucket and rusty chain and the irregular scattered cottages, each with its plot of garden and paved pathway, tightly-closed windows and open door, where here and there a child played on the threshold or a woman gossiped with her neighbour, adding a touch of life to the homely scene.

A white house behind a yew hedge with a dog-cart standing at the gate roused their momentary curiosity, swiftly appeased by the sight of a brass plate on the door.

"The village doctor," said April, pausing to glance approvingly at the chestnut mare fidgeting under a burden of flies, with lathered flanks that testified to a hard day's work.

The front door opened suddenly and a man looked out—an elderly man, with alert, thoughtful face.

"Shan't want you again, Simkins. Nine sharp tomorrow!" he called to the groom.

"Yessir, very good, sir." With an air of relief the man hitched up the restless mare and turned in to the stable yard beyond.

"Looks a good sort," said Majendie, "your Arcadian medico. Two to one you'll like him better than the parson. For you'll have to go to church now, Mrs. Panhasard, and sit in your own pew, and

teach in the Sunday school . . ." he chuckled delightedly at the notion. "Better take the Boys' class—you'll find it easier!"

April laughed softly. "I shouldn't mind—in fact I should rather like it. You forget I'm country-born and far more at home in an atmosphere like this than the one I have lately left."

She quickened her steps instinctively.

"There's the baker—I can see the loaves!"

"And the post office just beyond, with the telegraph wire running in at the side of the window to give it an air of official glory. When you come to think of it, what a curious link it is!—just that thread of wire that ends . . . and brings the news of the world."

April nodded, her face thoughtful.

"A few centuries ago it would have meant burning for witchcraft."

"Thus sins become virtues—a comforting reflection to the normal man." His brown eyes danced mischievously.

"Come along in, Mrs. Panhasard, and assert your independence."

They mounted the steps and a little bell above the door duly announced their entry.

"Cheese, candles"—Majendie sniffed—"bacon, and—glue, I think? No!" as he stumbled over a bale of stuff and stooped to rub his shin, "corduroy," he amended ruefully.

Behind the high counter a middle-aged man was laboriously making out a bill with a pencil that required incessant lubrication. He paid no attention to

his customers but continued to add up the column of figures with frowning brows, totting off the items with dirty fingers against the edge of the table.

"Good afternoon," said Majendie amiably.

The man completed the sum and raised a pair of blurred, watery eyes.

"Ar'ternoon." He acquiesced.

"I wonder if you could tell me," April gave him a doubtful glance, "if there are any houses to let in this neighbourhood?"

Silence save for the flies that buzzed in swarms about their heads and Majendie stifled an insane desire to laugh.

At last: "Would it be a little 'ouse or a large 'ouse you'll be wanting?" The man ventured cautiously. He had the appearance of being dazed by the sudden visitation.

Majendie, much amused, watched for her reply.

"A little house," she decided, "with a nice garden, of course."

The postmaster stared at her, wrestling with the problem.

"There be 'Croftons,'" he suggested slowly after another pause.

"And whereabouts is that?" She tried to hide her impatience—"is it in the village? Could I see it?" her foot tapped the floor.

"It belongs to a gen'leman as broke 'is neck last season."

It was obvious that the tragedy appealed to him. "Unting it were," he concluded grimly.

"Broke his neck?" April stared—"and is still alive?" She looked incredulously up at the stupid face before her.

"Lor' bless yer, no, marm!"—the man was amused—"in the Churchyard a year come October."

He leaned back against the wall surveying his audience.

"A fine funeral it were . . ." he started slowly.

But Majendie, in desperation, interposed.

"Yes, yes—but about the house. I'm afraid we haven't much time, you know! Is it possible to see it?"

The man drew in his horns, sulky at the interruption. For all answer he opened a glass door behind him, and:

"Mother!" he called to an invisible person within.

There was the sound of a chair being pushed back and presently there appeared a little old dame in a snowy frilled cap that surrounded her wrinkled face, spotlessly clean, infinitely alive, with shrewd bright eyes that twinkled merrily. She gave one quick glance at the visitors, dropped a bob curtsey and turned to rate her son.

"Now then, Giles, wake up, boy!—what be the gentry wanting?"

But April interposed, foreseeing an endless explanation.

"If you could tell us of a house to be let near here?—a small house with a big garden," she amended, smilingly.

The little old dame smiled back; and each wrinkle

in the seamed face seemed to speed the message, from the crowsfeet about the kind old eyes to the lines of humour that guarded the corners of the puckered mouth, experience and laughter joining hands, hal-lowed by the presence of age.

"I told 'un Croftons," said the son apologetically.

"Croftons!"—his mother sniffed—"not for the likes o' her——" She turned again on April the keen appraising eyes.

"Just for the 'unting, marm," she explained, "not a 'ouse for a lady at all. A couple o' men, per'aps, as is out and about all day. But my son Giles, 'e don't understand. 'E were allays stoopid, marm, from a babe, 'e were. 'E don't mean nothing"—she gave him a shrewish glance—" 'tis 'is father all over again!" she announced with a fine disregard of convention towards the dead. "I'm just thinking, marm"—she went on, ticking off the names on wrinkled fingers, encased in black mittens, winter and summer worn. "There's 'The Lodge'—on the Slingsby road. But it's been to let so long, 'tis all a-mouldy now, with rats and what not . . ." She saw April shudder and smiled again. "Aye, an' a ghost too, marm, as I've 'eard tell. Then there's 'Bankside,' where old Mrs. Wallace lived? But the garden's small, wi'out lawns, just a scrap all down the slope . . ." She shook her head doubtfully, her brows knit in thought.

"Oh, I must have a garden," said Mrs. Panhasard—"a large garden, and a field for cows—and stables."

A chuckle from her companion checked further desires.

"I thought you said a *little* house!" said Majendie in her ear.

"Well—not too big—not a great barracks of a place. I do hope I shall find one. It's such a pretty village."

She looked appealingly at the old woman, who surveyed her with approval.

"That it be, marm, as I knows, 'aving lived 'ere these seventy years, and my mother and her mother afore! And 'ealthy and quiet too, wi' none o' they racketty motors as brings trouble an' sickness on a place—grace be to God and an 'igh 'ill," she piously concluded.

Majendie was interested.

"Oh, you think that motors bring illness?"

He leaned on the high counter, his smooth young face in strange contrast to the wrinkled one beyond.

"Why yes, me dear," said she, "to be sure they do. A-stirring up o' dust and dirt that was meant to lie in peace."

"But we came here in one to-day," he laughed back at her, "with a Captain Newcomen who lives in this very place."

"But not up our 'ill, sir—they don't come up the 'ill." Her exultation was manifest. "They keeps down in the dale below 'Rodney's.' 'Tis the only one about", she added apologetically, "an' the Capt'in, bless 'is 'eart, be that careful . . . why, it's nigh on two years now since 'e's 'ad it and *no one 'urt!*" Eloquent tribute to the driver's humanity.

"But we're keeping the ledgy standing——" she

turned to the stolid Giles—"what about t' 'Landslide'?" she asked him sharply.

"T' 'Landslide'"—he repeated parrot fashion.

Impatiently, her eyes returned to April's face. "There's a nice 'ouse now, marm, wi' a fine garden too. A horchard an' stabling an' the river running by. It ain't in the village though—nigh on two mile it be, but there's a way across the fields by Horrock's Farm as brings you out 'andy below the School—'tis a nice place, fer sure, the 'Landslide.' "

"What a curious name!—but it sounds just the thing. I should like to see it. Who does it belong to? And how shall I set about it?"

Mother Tuckett smiled at her eager questioning.

"Be you staying here, marm?" and as she gave her address:

"At the 'Rodney'—eh! but it's none too clean since Elizabeth Judkins died, and that red'-aired slut from Lunnon a-marrying of Tom, and she, pore soul, but 'ardly cold in 'er grave. 'E's a changed man, Tom Judkins——" she paused and added with venom, "an' sarve 'im right."

April smiled and led her gently back to the point.

"And how do I get to this house?"

"Beg pardon, marm—but Elizabeth was me own brother's child and when I see . . ." she broke off hurriedly, conscious of missing the thread.

"I'll send Giles up to Doctor's—'e'll know best"—she resumed. "It's like this, marm, the gentleman as owns it lives abroad and I dunno who's there now since old Sarah left. It's furnished, marm," a shade

of concern crossed the wrinkled face, "maybe you're not wanting that?"

"Oh, yes I am—it will save me a lot of trouble—how excellent!—I should like to go there at once."

But Majendie drew out his watch with a significant gesture.

"We've got to get back and dine, you know—and order a cab to catch that ten o'clock train—at least, I must—but if you care to go alone . . .?"

"Better wait the night, marm," Mother Tuckett approved—"and my son Giles can take you in the morning. It's a good step out, whichever way you go—and I'll know all about it meself, by then, maybe."

She talked softly, as though persuading a fractious child, and April nodded her head in assent, drawn by the old woman's vivid personality.

"Thank you ever so much—I will certainly go tomorrow. I shall run in early and hear all your news."

She gathered up her sunshade, preparing to depart.

"It's no trouble, marm," again the old-fashioned curtsey, "it's a pleasure, marm, fer sure."

"I think I should like some of that cheese," said Majendie, suddenly. "It smells—ripe." He pulled out a handful of silver.

The postmaster woke abruptly from his dream.

"Yessir, certainly, sir—about how much, now?"

"I'll take the lot," said Majendie recklessly. Then to the old woman:

"And why is it called the 'Landslide'? You're sure the house is safe?"

"Lor' yessir," Mother Tuckett beamed upon him.

"Tie it up careful, now, Giles—none o' yer bits o' string"—and as the gruesome parcel proceeded: "Long ago, I've heard tell, sir—after a big storm, a part o' the 'ill fell in where the old quarries was. But no one remembers that. 'Twas afore the 'ouse was built and 'twas there in my Grandfather's time and 'twill last mine, fer sure—and yours too, me dear, and your children after."

She looked from one to the other, and simply, with the license of old age, proceeded to satisfy her curiosity.

"Your 'usband, marm?"

At the suddenness of the question April Panhasard coloured.

"Or brother maybe?" said the old woman, with a twinkle in her eye.

"Neither the one nor the other." April felt non-plussed. Gallantly Majendie threw himself into the breach.

"Only a cousin," he lied, his eyes fixed ahead.

And at this most opportune moment the shop-bell tinkled. A small child with a large basket thrust herself through the opening, bumped into Majendie's legs and brought up against the counter, one grimy paw outstretched, clasping two ha'pennies.

"Pennorth o' lump, please," she demanded in a shrill, important voice.

Mother Tuckett's face underwent a sudden change. "You bide your time, Maria-Maud," she said severely, "I'll tell your Mother of you—a-pushing yer way in like that afore the gentry!"

Under cover of the little storm the pair gratefully departed.

"Boris!—how *could* you?" April drew a deep breath of relief as the shop door closed behind them.

"Forgive me, my dear—it was touch and go you know—I *had* to be something!"

He looked at her with a shame-faced smile and was relieved to see a tell-tale dimple appear at the corner of her tight-closed lips.

"After all you can't be sure that the houses of Majendie and Panhasard were not closely allied in the past—" he raised one eyebrow whimsically, glancing at her sideways out of mischievous brown eyes.

It was a habit of his she loved, as one learns to love the peculiar tiny traits in the faces of friends, seeking for them as sign-posts down the long road of affection. "This way humour lies"—the arched brow sped the message and involuntarily a little gust of indulgent laughter shook her.

"What am I to say?" she cried raising an admonishing finger—"except that I utterly and entirely repudiate you as cousin of mine."

"I feel horribly snubbed," but his face belied the words, "it's such a nice relationship—so near and yet so far. By the way, you can make it as 'distant' as you like—always provided"—he added the saving clause—"that it doesn't dwindle down to my being permanently 'removed'!"

And with this, incontinently, he threw the "ripe" cheese over the nearest hedge.

CHAPTER V

“DARLING?”

“Wait a minute, Bosun.” Candida added a last stitch to a thread of gold in the embroidery frame before her, then raised a smiling face to meet her son’s reiterated demand for attention.

“You re’ember the lady we drove from the station the day Skipper came home from Scotland? Well . . .”—he moved nearer, breathlessly, full of his great news—“she’s took the Landslide!”

“‘Taken,’ dear, not ‘took.’” Candida amended.

“‘Taken,’ ” said the child impatiently—“but just listen, *do!*” He gave his mother’s knee a little pat with a somewhat grimy paw, his face keen with interest.

“Old Mother Tuckett told me. And she’s there now and has got a dog-cart and horse and Mary Tuckett’s her cook and there’s piles and piles of luggage and Tom’s gone down to mow the lawn . . . and the man with the jolly laugh’s her cousin and . . . and I think that’s all!”

“And quite enough, too!”—Candida smiled as the reciter of these wonders paused for breath. “But I’m very glad to hear it. She looked interesting. And it’s a dear old house—a pity it’s been to let so long. Do you hear, John?” She glanced across at

her husband, who nodded silently, engrossed in his work.

"So the man was her cousin," she added thoughtfully, "he looked too young for her husband: I guessed him to be her brother," and she gathered up the skeins of silk again.

"We shan't be able to play at Robber's Caves there now," the Bosun decided, "but since Freddie went to school, there's no one to play with." He sighed dolefully, his bright face clouding over.

"There's Alan," his mother suggested. "Would you like to ask him to tea to-day? He hasn't seen your new bat yet—the one that Skipper brought you."

"No." The Bosun shook his curly head. "But I don't suppose he'd come. I never see him now that his big brother's home."

He stared wistfully across the verandah where they sat to the edge of the sunk fence, dividing the smooth lawn from the buttercup-flecked fields beyond.

"I wish I'd got a brother," he said suddenly.

Newcomen looked up quickly at the words, from where he knelt, busily repairing a broken corner of lattice work. A slight frown contracted his features and furtively he glanced at his wife, golden head bent low over her embroidery frame, apparently engrossed in that absorbing task.

"You're very busy to-day," he hazarded at last, conscious of the pause that had followed the childish speech. "Isn't that fine work rather trying to your eyes?"

"No, I don't find it so. Besides, it's Church work,

John—you ought to commend me.” Her voice was grave, but mischief danced round her smiling mouth. “I told the poor vicar he should have it for Whitsuntide! And now it must be for Christmas, or possibly next Easter.” She laughed ruefully. “I never seem to have time for anything in the holidays.”

“Supposin’ . . .” said the Bosun ingratiatingly, “supposin’ we went a little walk? Oh, not far, Darling,” as his mother shook her head, “just across the fields past Horrock’s Farm and along the river path?”

“To the Landslide, in fact, to see those ‘piles and piles’ of luggage arrive?”

The boy clapped his hands excitedly.

“Yes, yes . . . oh, Darling, *do!*”

“Don’t worry your mother, Bosun. Can’t you see she’s busy?”

Newcomen watched the pair, with that little crease ever between his brows, hopelessly conscious of how the affair would end.

Well he knew his wife; the curious weakness and strength of her sunny temperament; that spirit of self-immolation, roused by the call of love, that in many a woman is misunderstood and leads to such hopeless ruin.

“Well—go and get your boots,” Candida raised her head. “Your strong ones, Bosun, it’s damp down by the river. And bring me my blue hat—Susan will give it you.” She stirred herself resolutely as the boy darted indoors. “After all, a little exercise will do me a world of good.”

“Nonsense!” Newcomen was annoyed. “You’ve

been on your feet all day. You're becoming a perfect slave to the child. It's time he went to school."

His wife gave him a startled glance.

"Oh, he's far too young!" her voice, indignant at first, sank to a pleading note. "And he's *so* good—not a bit of trouble, really. You can't expect a boy of his age to sit still all day long!"

Newcomen shrugged his shoulders and drove a nail sharply into the wood.

"He'd be better at school with other boys," but he kept his eyes averted. "It's no business of mine, I know, and—I suppose—you'd miss the child—but it's got to come, my dear. It's not fair on a lad to be tied to apron-strings"

He broke off at the sound of light feet pattering through the hall and stood up with a sigh of relief after his cramped position, surveying his handiwork.

"That ought to last now—it's the weight of the creeper that pulls it from the wall. Ah, there's another weak place——" he bent to examine it as his wife stood up, pinning on her hat, mirrored in the dark pane of glass in the window from the hall.

"Well—good-bye," he glanced back at her. "Don't go too far and get overtired now."

The old protective note in his voice stirred an answering chord in her heart, and obeying a sudden impulse Candida moved across to where he was kneeling again, and, stooping down, kissed the man's bronzed cheek.

"Good-bye, Skipper." For a moment the blue eyes met his own, wistful and tender beyond their

wont, and a slight colour stole up under her fair skin.

From beneath the shady hat a little curl had escaped, golden as the threads of her embroidery, and it twined against her round throat like the tendril of a vine.

And as he gazed at it the piece of wood in Newcomen's hand suddenly snapped in two, powerless in the force of his secret grip.

With an effort Candida laughed.

"Now you've broken it!" She leaned back, away from him, against the edge of wall, gazing down at the stooping figure, still youthful in its easy and supple strength.

"But what a handy man it is! Do you know, John, you're the envy and despair of the village carpenter. He came down here on Friday and looked at the chicken-coops. 'Couldn't ha' done it better meself,' was the flattering verdict."

Newcomen cleared his throat.

"You forget he's courting Kate?" His voice was drily amused.

"And he thinks the short cut to her affections is to get round Kate's mistress by praising you? Is that the subtle suggestion?"

She laughed merrily and once more their eyes met.

"All's fair in love and war, I suppose?" again he steadied his voice.

"Is it?" A spark of the old daring had flashed into her face, that indomitable spirit that had carried her unscathed in soul through the days of her despair. And with it something else, a breathless flicker of

hope, that died away as he turned again, resolute, to his work.

"Darling, do come . . ." The boy dragged at her hand. "It's getting ever so late and old Tom leaves off early." His dark eyes glanced from his step-father back to his mother's face.

"Go with the child." Newcomen groped for the hammer—"another nail *here*, I think—" he drove it firmly in place.

For a moment Candida hesitated; then, as the Bosun gave an impatient sigh, she let him lead her away, across the lawn and by the bridge that spanned the deep dyke to a narrow lane between the fields, winding down the slope.

After a minute or two had passed Newcomen wheeled round, watching the two figures slowly disappear; the slight graceful one of his wife in her blue linen dress and the boy's, sailor-clad, his head held high, sturdy legs trotting beside her, full of that nameless quality suggesting gentle birth.

Once Candida paused to gather a handful of flowers, bright poppies that grew at the edge of the young corn. He could see her knot them together, then tuck them in her belt. And at the sight memory played him a trick; and the green fields vanished before the swift mirage of a land where Hope had reared a castle to the skies.

A blue linen dress, a bright flower at her waist . . .

High above them Ravello carved against the Heavens; the silvery green of olive slopes and the sapphire cloudless sky; with the babbling music of

the stream that paused to foam and chatter round the busy paper mills as it raced onward again to Amalfi and the sea.

Later a moonlit scene: the grey cloisters of the Capucines, their worn paving-stones and the stars hanging over the sea with bright restless eyes, watching a man and woman measure each other's minds and friendship quicken to life in a mutual sympathy.

Newcomen ground his heel into the gravel walk.

Would he had never sailed to that haunted Southern land! But he choked back the wish, torn in the conflict of love and baffled desire. His strong face was drawn like that of a man in pain. For alone he knew the depths of his own despair; the grim battle daily fought under the impenetrable reserve that was his armour through life.

Now, for a short spell, he laid the mask aside, conscious of a breathing space, a moment to himself.

Methodically, with characteristic neatness he put away his tools, tied back a fluttering pennon of the dislodged creeper; then sat down heavily in his wife's vacant chair, arms folded, chin set, staring grimly before him.

And far away, across the vista of years, he saw himself again, clear-eyed and simple-hearted; that John Newcomen so orthodox in his views; rigid in principle—narrow perhaps, but happy and sincere—with a reverence for life, a plain belief in God and man and the mastery of the sea. Golden days of hope, stern work and high ideals, good fellowship

with men and a shy respect that left him dumb in the presence of womankind.

Then had come Candida and overwhelming love, the whole pitiful story, step by step, of her lonely temptation, weakness and sacrifice; which had opened his eyes at last to a wider outlook, a broader, manlier sympathy with life.

By a curious freak of fate, blameless himself, but nevertheless involved in the tangle of intrigue about her, he had barely escaped a share in the public ignominy of divorce, through the sudden death of her husband, the scholar, Geoffrey Clifton.

The path thus smoothed ahead and his greatest sacrifice—that of his profession—no longer a necessity to his scrupulous soul, he had married the woman he loved, shattered in health and spirits, deserted in her hour of need by the man who had caused her downfall and clinging to Newcomen's strong arm as a child clings to its nurse.

Then had followed the deep anxiety of the nameless child's birth and the slow creeping back to life of Candida herself as Autumn colored the leaves to the same deep glory as the rich red soil in the Devonshire home he had brought her to on the day of her flight from town.

But before the first snows had powdered the orchard's boughs and Candida's strength had returned, whilst out of her gratitude a tiny spark of love lay smouldering for his touch, the Sea claimed him again, an inexorable mistress that robbed him of his wife. Letters for two long years were the only link between

them; years in which love strengthened with the deep nature of the man and which seemed to the woman a respite, weary from the cruel path she had trod.

He remembered how he had counted the days to his long looked-for return to the new home she had found at Coddell-in-the-Dale, checking them like a schoolboy in his cabin almanac!

Now, he threw back his head and laughed aloud at the thought and the hopeless disillusion that had followed the dream of dreams.

For he had found at the end of his pilgrimage not Candida the wife but Candida the mother, utterly absorbed in her child: grateful, tender, frank, but with all trace of passion—that white fire kindled by Derrick Kilmarny's touch—ashes that Newcomen dared not stir, a burnt-out sacrifice.

For ever, as hope, that dies hard, flamed at a look or word, the child stood between them, the child with his father's eyes.

With his beautiful bright face, his inherited subtle charm, in the very poise of his dark head, where Nature, the grim old nurse, had laid the final touch, that mystic lock of snow, lay the secret of his birth.

Derrick Kilmarny's son! The man that Newcomen hated beyond all men on earth, he who had robbed Candida of her soul's peace now robbed him of his rights.

For the sailor came of a grim old stock, puritan to the core. Where weakness might have won, his strength barred the way. He knew nothing of women. Rigidly moral, he failed where another, less scrupu-

lous, would have gained by experience. For a man who marries without a 'past' is doomed to meet with perplexity in the present.

Newcomen, with his wounded pride, with no real knowledge of the sex, proved in himself the stumbling-block on the road to happiness. Tied by the curious conditions which had led to their sudden marriage, he held himself in check, misunderstanding her.

And there is no gulf so wide as this that only passion can bridge. Dreamers and poets may dream and theorise but the basis of marriage has always been the physical need to mate and on this need alone can married life be built. The spiritual may follow, the perfect companionship, but a man denied is a man incomplete who holds his virility slighted and a wife 'undesired' bears a hidden wound in her heart, a knowledge of intimate failure that leaves her desolate.

In his despair Newcomen turned to his old narrow views: to belief in a merciless God, tracking with ruthless feet the way of sin and sinners.

This was the punishment, the presence of the child. At times he blamed himself; seeing how love forbidden had caught him in its toils. To care for a married woman! . . . how had he ever dreamed that good might come of it?

Back he went to sea, turning to the "Great White Mother" in his soul's necessity; working as a man works who dreads the hour for rest. And, as if in mockery of his prayer to sleep at last rocked on her merciful breast, Fate guarded him gravely from peril, bringing him honour, promotion: gifts he dared

not ask. His submarine went down, with all hands on board, Newcomen alone saved from the death-roll by an urgent call to shore. Sickness played around him and he stood a man apart, shielded as men are shielded wherever they long for death.

It seemed to him in his bitter pride as though high Heaven spurned him, to pay the ultimate price of another man's offence.

Meanwhile, in solitude, the days slipped by at home, and Candida filled her life with love for her only child.

By a curious fate, for the second time marriage had left her free; a monotony of peace cut by the still-live memory of a brief month of passion.

Nevertheless this freedom, that with Clifton she had gratefully accepted, rankled at times in the depths of her heart as John Newcomen's wife. For it seemed a wall between them that daily grew in height, dividing their mental sympathies as surely as their physical. But, proud and sensitive as himself, she played her passive part with all a woman's skill; seeing in her husband's eyes nothing but staid affection, the cold attitude of a man accustomed to celibacy; reading moreover what was not there, a tinge of contempt for a creature so frail who had stooped from the moral heights where dwelt his own ideals.

And with a mother's perspicacity she divined the hidden antipathy to the child. Just, kind, considerate as he ceaselessly strove to be, he could not bring himself to love the offspring of Kilmarny. Jealously she

guarded her treasure from his touch. Wherever the choice lay between them, the child won the day.

At times like these Newcomen hated him. All his lofty principles, his endeavour to be just, could not avail him in moments where he saw himself de-throned.

As he sat there now, reviewing the hopeless case, he pictured the pair together, knit by their perfect sympathy, happy beyond dispute.

And a great longing for the sea, for the clean white decks where he reigned supreme, for the mastership now denied him, rose up overpoweringly with its mite of consolation. He sprang to his feet and walked up and down, steadily measured paces; and then, far away across the fields, came the sound of a child's laugh. . . .

With a quick turn he wheeled about and went into the empty house.

CHAPTER VI

"THE ditch is deep," said Majendie, "and has an inviting air. . . . If I were not a brave man I should ask to get out and walk! And here comes another milestone . . ." He turned a pathetic glance towards April's laughing face and added triumphantly:

"I told you so!" as the roan cob for the second time slewed the light cart perceptibly nearer to the perilous edge of the road.

"It's only play," said April—"he never really shies. A quiet old dear, aren't you?" She touched his sleek side lightly with the whip as they started to climb a hill, leaving the river behind and the distant village of Coddell-in-the-Dale.

"We're nearly there," she said consolingly. "Courage, my friend. Here comes the American girl." For a couple of riders had turned the bend, and descended the slope towards them.

A slim figure in a grey riding habit, glancing past the groom, gave them a full bright look.

Majendie, nothing loth, returned it with interest.

"By Jove—she's pretty, though. Rides with a leading-rein! I suppose she's a fair beginner? Tell me all about her."

"I don't know much," April looked amused. "But the name is Van Someren and she keeps house for her

brother. They've taken a cottage on the river bank, not far from mine—in fact they're my nearest neighbours on this side of Coddell. Mary Tuckett, my cook, who hears all the village news, informed me they were newcomers *and*—this with the orthodox mistrust—‘foreigners’!” she laughed. “The girl is learning to ride in order to hunt next season—doing the thing thoroughly, you observe—absorbing England and English sports with an ardent zeal for knowledge. Now, would it ever occur to you, if you went to New York, to start immediately to master the inner rites of Baseball?”

“Heaven forbid!” Majendie’s voice was devout. “I should spend all my days and nights in acquiring a knowledge of Cocktails. This air is delightfully thirsty, don’t you think?”

“Well, Mary makes beautiful lemonade,” she smiled at his quick grimace, “and now, if you look to the left, in a minute or two you will get your first peep of the house.”

They turned down a lane as she spoke, running at right angles from the metalled road and leading them back to the dale with its curving line of water.

Majendie bent forward with eager eyes as a red gable gleamed between the trees.

“Is that it? how delightful!—and there’s the famous landslip.”

For a part of the hill had been torn away and against this cliff of fir-topped rock and earth, that sheltered it from the north, the old house was set like a gem, dully glowing in a luxuriance of green.

As they turned in at the gate, the drive, bordered by fine old limes, enclosed them in a sweetly scented arch, where the bees, ceaselessly stirring, sent up a droning note, the sleepy music of summer that runs like a silver thread through warm and sunny days.

From this they emerged on an open space at the side of the two-storied building; red gravel bordered by clipped yew hedge and a porch with Corinthian pillars, utterly astray in the warm-toned brick façade, greeted them imposingly, burdened with heavy creepers.

A groom ran out of the shrubbery and came to the roan cob's head. April sprang lightly to the ground and led the way indoors to a cool paved hall with a gallery running round it, connected by wide stairs with the ground floor where they stood.

"Now—just come here—" she caught him by the arm and hurried him forward into a room beyond. He had a vague impression of sunlight, flowers and old-world chintz, a fragrance unmistakable of pot-pourri and the sweet faint scent of ancient books that are leather-bound, and then she had drawn him through the French window and they were standing on the steps beneath, looking down on a scene so perfect that he caught his breath for very wonder and delight.

For it seemed to him that he touched the tender heart of earth—the inmost sanctuary of Pan himself, hiding among the reeds.

The smooth old lawn sloped gently, bordered by clustering trees, undefiled by flower-beds or mechani-

cal aid of man; nothing but green, pure green, in every tone and shade save where a single copper beech glowed against the sky. Cutting it like a silvery sword, moved the silent shallow stream, slow and calm, wending its way, its long road to the sea. Here and there a willow dipped to kiss it with pale lips or a swallow skimmed the surface with a flash of pointed wings. Beyond lay another glade, a clearing in the woods, wilder, more sylvan in its neglected beauty; and then—a shining miracle!—the river swept about, throwing a burnished arm across, a laughing sister stream that fed the wheel of a distant mill, in a swirl of troubled spray. Soft curve on curve the far off hills began, eager shoulders pressing upwards, with baby peaks that peered between their elders' forms, ever higher, ever hazier, until they merged shapeless into the deep blue of Heaven, that brooded over all.

"My dear . . .!" Majendie slipped a hand through April's arm and stood there, fascinated, beside her. She watched him, in sympathy with his mood, her face touched with awe.

"The little dimpled hills have fallen asleep,
The dancing shadows rest a while from play,
The drowsy earth nods to the drowsy sky,
And even Pan has laid his pipes away,
Till Time himself says 'Hush' as they go by."

He quoted. Then, with a laugh—the shamefaced attitude of the Anglo-Saxon conscious of sentiment—he reminded her of her promise.

"And what about that excellent lemonade?"

"We'll go round to the dining-room—this way—I was forgetting all my duties. The fact is I am so absurdly pleased with my new home!"

"I don't wonder. I never saw such a view—it looks like the setting of a Canterbury Tale."

He followed her along the tiled path to a further window where a large black cat sat sleepily on the steps, blinking at the sun, and they passed into the room within.

"Whiskey, I suppose? Or will you have some tea?" She gave him an enquiring glance. "Tea is much better for you on a hot day like this."

"Of course, an admirable institution—but I *think* . . ." he reached across for the decanter. "I think such a noble house deserves a health—a 'Highland' health, shall we say? . . . Here's 'luck and love'!" He drained the glass and gave a sigh of enjoyment unalloyed.

She watched him with kindly eyes, pleased to play hostess in her new domain, as he glanced about the room approvingly, at the panelled walls and old Chippendale chairs, the manifold evidences of a quiet taste rare in a "furnished house."

"The owner of this knew something," he remarked conclusively—"I think it's just perfect, April, a regular treasure-trove."

"Now come up and see your room. I've given you a little one in the wing with a corner-window and the river view. I thought you'd like it better than the somewhat melancholy apartment obviously labelled 'guest.'"

"Rather! But I want to see the whole place from attic down to cellar and Mary Tuckett—a relation, I suppose, of our post-office friend?—and the stables and garden and dogs. Have you a dog, by the way?"

"Only a cat, so far, who troubles me sorely by catching the young birds."

Together they mounted the staircase, crossed the gallery and passing through a narrow baize door went up two steps, along a little passage and down two steps into a low-roofed room—a room with dimity curtains, blue washed walls and a gabled window, wreathed in a mass of flowering clematis.

"The only drawback is earwigs—I warn you, they literally swarm—but there are no black-beetles or mice."

"Or rats or ghosts, I hope—I'm a timid soul."

"Well—we haven't found either yet. Mary Tuckett's a shade disappointed—she revels in the occult. Yesterday I caught her telling the housemaid's fortune, in sepulchral accents, with the tea-leaves in her cup. There's your bag—and candles—and matches—soap . . ." She moved about daintily, seeing to his requirements—"and heaps of writing paper. Think of the love-letters that should blossom forth from such a view as this!"

For he still stood by the window, his eyes drinking it in.

At her laughing speech, however, a slight shade crossed his face.

"Oh, bother the love-letters!" his voice was abrupt, "one doesn't want them here."

A rosy-cheeked maid bustled in with a can of hot water, demurely anxious for a first peep at the guest.

"This is Lottie," said April smiling, "will you give her your keys? But don't dress to-night as we'll go on the river after—it's delicious in the evening."

"Have you a boat?—how splendid! I should rather think we would!"

"Well—dinner's at seven o'clock. We're quite rustic, you see; so I'll leave you now—you'll hear the gong and find me in the hall."

"But all the same," said Majendie, as the door closed behind her, "I oughtn't to be here. I hope to goodness it won't land her into trouble."

He refused the housemaid's offer of help and began to pitch his clothes out carelessly on the floor, his young face grave, pondering on the subject.

"I don't see how anyone can know, and the whole thing's absurd! But it's just one of those ridiculously innocent affairs which the righteous will not credit. It's odd how the world turns up its nose at clean, sound friendship . . ."

He came across a letter addressed in a sprawling unformed hand and tossed it on to the writing-table beyond. Then, as an afterthought, reached out his arm and returned it to the bag; snapped the lock with a gesture of weariness and gave himself up whole-heartedly to the joy of a mighty wash.

"It really is so nice to have some one at last to talk to!"

April gave a little sigh of contentment. "Of course it's a paradise of a place, but I was beginning to gather dimly how Adam felt in Eden before the advent of Eve!"

"Well I'm quite prepared to be amiable and pose as an endless Eve," Majendie laughed back at her across the bowl of sweet-peas that formed the only decoration to the simple table, "especially with Mary Tuckett as cook. I don't suppose Eve was much use at savouries—though apple-pie she would certainly learn to make!"

"And put fewer cloves in it, I hope. That is the worst of country fare, the passion for herbs and spices. Mary revels in them—what she calls 'flavouring.' Only the French really understand the secret of proportion; but Mary believes in broad hints that cannot be ignored. She's not a bad cook, though, on the whole and quite a character, full of a quaint wisdom, half country lore, half utter superstition. Yesterday," April paused to offer her guest some fruit, "we could get no food at all! There was a wedding in the village and Mary was bridesmaid—such a substantial one! She wore white cotton gloves and a sky-blue hat and had scrubbed her face until it shone like a full-blown cabbage-rose. And what do you think she gave the bride? You'll never guess, I know."

"I don't like to risk a conjecture," Majendie smiled mischievously. "Do tell me? I can think of so many possibly useful things."

But April hastily forestalled his suggestions, "A horse and trap," she announced.

"Never!" Majendie stared—"of course—there's some joke, I see."

April laughed back into his astonished eyes.

"You can picture my face when she told me! I began to wonder if I were entertaining an heiress unawares. Then she explained the matter: 'Oh, not a *real* one, marm—it's just a country way. There's always someone as gives it—a clothes 'orse it be, marm, with a mouse-trap, for sure.' Isn't that nice?"

Majendie roared.

"Delicious! it's the limit. I must really make her acquaintance."

"So you shall, to-morrow. She shall tell your fortune too if we catch her in the mood. She has 'fey' days it seems and days when the power leaves her—there is honestly a touch of clairvoyance in it."

"I hope she will be discreet. I feel a little frightened." He helped himself to some more strawberries.

"It seems she foretold the evil fate of our host at the 'Admiral Rodney'—in his first wife's presence too! I suggested it might have hurt her to learn of a successor. 'O lor' no, marm,' said Mary comfortably. '*She* knew what Tom were, arter twenty years o' marriage, an' one o' her last words, poor soul, when 'er time came to be called was what a comfort it were to think as how "number two" wouldn't half keep the place as well as she'd ha' done 'erself.' "

She mimicked the rustic speech, conscious of an appreciative audience.

"There's sound logic in it, when you come to think it out," Majendie turned the matter over—"nobody

really *wants* to die and believe the world will go on serenely as before; it's just human nature to hope the machinery will feel the sudden jar."

One of those silences that only friendship permits knit them together with its link of sympathy.

Then April turned the subject lightly.

"I'm glad you could get away. I thought when I wrote that the week-end would be better."

"Well—as it happens . . ." he hesitated for a second, a slight frown on his face as though seeking an explanation.

Then, turning towards her, frankly, "I don't know whether I told you that a friend has lent me a cottage? oh! not the rural palace people loftily refer to as 'my cottage in the country,' but a real three-roomed affair—primitive indeed—but rather nice for the week-ends, especially this weather. It's at Datchet and the man to whom it belongs has gone off abroad. So I generally run down there from a Saturday to a Monday. I like the simple life—when it's taken in small doses!"

"But isn't it rather dull—all alone by yourself?"

He gave her a quick glance and, meeting her clear eyes, a tinge of colour stole up under his sunburnt skin.

"It's a relief to get out of London and . . . I don't find it so. I've friends at Windsor, you see, and my pals look in occasionally. Besides I love the river. Give me a pair of sculls and an open stretch of water . . ."

"And a boat, I presume," April laughed, "which

reminds me, it's getting late. Let's drink our coffee and go out—it's too fine to stay indoors."

They gathered up wraps and cushions and armed with these made their way to the boat-house, a dilapidated shed rendered picturesque by a thatch of Virginian creeper. Inside lay a venerable looking boat, flat-bottomed and devoid of paint.

"Not beautiful," April conceded, "but errs on the side of safety—nothing short of a water-spout could turn it over." She stepped in neatly and piled the cushions behind her, as Majendie unfastened the rusty chain and with a rueful glance at the wide rowlocks settled down to his sculls with the air of a man who loves his work.

"We'll row against the stream," suggested his hostess as they emerged from the cobwebbed gloom, "and then drift back with the current. I rather wish, boy, you didn't look so energetic."

"It won't last long," Majendie smiled; "it's the first fine spurt of the townsman to prove his mettle. I can't 'feather' you know, with oars like these."

"No, but you'll have to punt with them when we stick in a shallow part! I circled desperately for ten minutes on the top of a submerged island, the first time I explored the stream, to the huge joy of a small boy fishing from the bank. He wanted to wade in and come to my assistance."

"How small was he?" said Majendie, suspiciously.

"Why, of course," April remembered—"you know the little fellow—it was the 'Bosun' of our memorable ride."

"Really? He'd naturally want to take command of the boat."

"Well, when I was afloat again I picked him up and carried him off to tea, and, the day after, his mother called upon me. She's charming when you get to know her. Oh, I've been quite gay I assure you—a real bevy of visitors. On Tuesday the curate came. Very pink and young, desperately anxious to find out all about me and far too inexperienced to risk the questions I could see he was dying to ask. He talked of his university and the size of the local strawberries, drifted to cricket scores and a new porch for the Church, drank four cups of tea apologetically and departed, pleased with himself and, I trust, pleased with me; evidently the advance guard of the vicar and his wife, who left formal cards on the Friday after. The Rev. James Moneypenny—of the 'gentle student' type (so Mrs. Newcomen led me to understand), with a virago of a wife who rules the village by right of clerical inheritance—her father having been the late incumbent. I'm rather afraid of her, to tell you the truth."

April leaned back happily, the steering ropes in her hands, her eyes fixed ahead on the curving line of bank, where the trees dipped down to the water's edge and faded indistinctly into the fringe of feathery rushes.

"She's a restless little person, made of wire and concrete, with a face like a weazel and tight hair drawn into a tight knot behind."

"What a horrible description." Boris shuddered.
"Whatever did you say to her?"

"Nothing." April laughed. "I was 'out' when she came, in the London sense I mean; snugly ensconced behind the sunblinds in my bedroom. A merciful escape as she evidently took the statement literally and walked about the place as if it belonged to her."

Majendie leaned forward on his oars.

"You don't mean to say she did?"

"Rather! I saw it myself. She marched down the verandah, peered in at both the dining-room and drawing-room, found Lottie in the latter and asked her all sorts of questions and finally bullied the gardener about his early peas—which it seems are in advance of the Vicarage ones—all this with the calm authority of the Parent of the Parish."

"Weren't you wild?—I never heard such cheek."

"I felt sorely tempted to put in an appearance! Only the poor vicar's martyred face restrained me. He kept on saying—(I heard him from the window) : 'My dear, we ought to be going—there's a storm coming up from the west'—and, if he meant me, it certainly threatened!"

Majendie was much amused.

"Despite all this talk of Disestablishment, it is curious to see how the power of the church still thrives in the depths of the country-side. Picture a London vicar invading a strange parishioner's house in this fantastic fashion. Hullo!—what's this?"

For as they turned the bend, round a high clump of willows, a garden met their view, dotted with even

beds, primly set with the orthodox bedding plants, and neat green tubs that broke the line of gravelled path, leading up to a house, that shone, with its lighted windows, through the dusk.

"It's where those Americans live—would you like to get out and call?"

She looked mischievously at her visitor's interested face.

"No—but let's spy a little—it's too dark to be seen."

Noiselessly, like a pair of conspirators, they drew up in the shadow of the landing-stage, conscious of music that stole towards them from the lamp-lit room above.

Someone was playing Chopin with a crisp, light touch; soft notes of magic that seemed to suit the night—gay with an indefinable undercurrent of sorrow—that desperate love of life fleeing the thought of death that is the hall-mark of genius consumptive-born.

The last frail chord echoed on a sweet minor note. Then a chair grated upon the floor and a man's voice, deep and coaxing, broke the short spell of calm.

"Oh, Honey, do . . . Just once—just a bar or two?" followed by a girl's merry laugh.

"I surely don't believe you care for anything else! —it's the only tune you know or ever *will* know, Lorry."

Then the piano again, this time noisily.

As the familiar air caught them in its spell, the two voices joined in, young and fresh and utterly untrained:

"O, Maryland, my Maryland . . ."

Majendie, laughing, whistled it under his breath. "They sound jolly, don't they? You'll have to know them, April. Before I run down again, if possible."

"But I didn't come here, my dear boy, to provide you with society," Mrs. Panhasard objected lazily: "You forget my immediate aim was for peace and quietude. Besides"—she gave an inquisitive glance at the lighted window as a shadow crossed the space—"I don't think I care for Americans—altogether!"

"Oh, you insular Englishwoman!" Boris was amused. "All the same"—he stuck to his point obstinately—"it would make it less dull for you to know a few of your neighbours. I don't think the vicar's wife will entirely suit your needs."

He pushed out from the bank and, turning the bows downstream, shipped his oars and slid down into the broad well of the boat, his hands clasped round his knees, leaning against the seat he had discarded.

"Honestly now, Petronilla"—he looked up at her thoughtfully—"are you happy in this place?"

Then, as she answered nothing, he added quickly, his eyes still on her face:

"Perhaps—it's not fair. I oughtn't to have asked."

At his apologetic voice, she smiled.

"Why not, my dear?" Her voice was gentle; soft as the picture she made, outlined against the stream. About her slim shoulders she had drawn a cloak of madonna blue and it seemed to blend with the evening sky, in that mystical hue beloved by painters of Cinque-cento days. A light scarf of lace was wound about her head and beneath its folds her hair in the

shadowy light gleamed like a saint's aura, burnished, mystical. Her beautiful clear eyes, under lashes tipped with gold, were the colour of the sea in a Southern sunlit bay, the dark pupils gathering intensity from the night.

Majendie could not tear his own eyes away as he watched her thoughtfully framing her reply.

"Yes"—she answered at last—"I really think I am. Almost . . . quite happy, boy."

"'Almost.'" He slipped a hand gently over her own that were clasped lightly together above the steering ropes, as they drifted down imperceptibly through the silence of the night.

"You can't kill memories, Boris—that is the worst of life. All that we do, that people do to us—lives on . . . indefinitely

"I hope not." His face was grave. "There must come an end, somewhere . . ."

"I wonder?"

She gazed straight before her, with a wistful gaze, piercing the veil of time. Above their heads the stars began to show, and a crescent moon stole tiptoe through the trees. Somewhere across the fields an owl, with its mournful cry, sought for its nightly prey, and a bat whirled down with blundering wings, still blinded with the light.

The warmth of the man's hand over hers roused April from her abstraction, bringing with it the comfort of human touch and the realisation of this one loyal friend.

She bent forward impulsively.

"You mustn't worry about me, boy—women are all moods!—and—one never knows . . . There may be all sorts of pleasant things ahead. Meanwhile it's good to have you here. Tell me about yourself —how is the world going?"

"Oh, the usual way . . . plenty of fun, plenty of debts! Good sport, in fact—and a fine pack of worries in full cry."

A shade of recklessness in his voice startled her.

"As bad as that? I'm sorry. Do you care to tell me about it?"

"Oh, I *couldn't!*" He drew his hand away and, with an effort, resumed his lighter manner. "I wouldn't harass your soul for worlds by the full confession of my dissolute career. According to my family I am on the downward path, steep (and pleasant) as the descent to Avernus—that's when they add up my bills!"

He laughed aloud, settling himself more easily in the bottom of the boat, with a cushion under his head and his long legs stretched out luxuriously.

"Don't let's talk of such things on a golden night like this. Tell me more of the Newcomens and my young friend the 'Bosun'."

"Oh, he's a fine little chap"—she divined his intention of evading serious subjects—"his mother worships him—it's quite pretty to see the two together. I like Mrs. Newcomen. She's so amusing and inclined to be unconventional—a thorn, I fancy, in the side of the vicar's wife."

"Good for her!" Majendie lighted a cigarette.

"You don't mind smoke, do you—what is her deadly sin?"

"A fondness apparently for the black sheep of the village." April smiled.

"All of them?—what a brick! Or just one in particular?"

"A village this size doesn't possess many! It seems Mrs. Newcomen has espoused the cause of *The black sheep*—an unfortunate girl of twenty—and has taken her into her service, in direct opposition to Mrs. Mon-eypenny's advice."

"'Unfortunate'?—the usual village tragedy, I suppose?"

"Exactly——" April's face, serious for a moment, dimpled into a smile.

"Out with it—you're hiding something——"

Majendie watched her expression.

"What is the joke? I see there *is* one, so it's no good being mysterious."

"Only something that Mary said—a delicious country phrase."

"*Do* tell me."

"I hardly like to—oh, it's very simple, really." But she hesitated anew.

"For a lady who prides herself on an independent attitude regarding the conventions . . ." Majendie began to the night at large.

"Oh—very well—it was only that Mary said—Mary, the wise, who sees things as they are—'She were always a pleasant-spoken girl, were Ruth, and we were all on us right sorry for her when she

had 'er come-by-chance'! *There!*" April coloured, to the boy's keen amusement. "I oughtn't to have told you, but I knew the quaint expression would amuse you."

"It's charming—strikes such a casual note. I can imagine the indignation of the virtuous vicar's wife—whose 'charity' begins and ends at weak soup and blankets! I suppose it lives on, beautiful, as they always are, a warning to the parish?"

"No. Mercifully, it died."

"Why 'mercifully'?" He sat upright suddenly, looking at his hostess with bright, inquisitive eyes. "I don't quite follow you. Why deprive the Black Sheep of her ewe lamb? She might be allowed this tender consolation."

"Ah . . . but the child?" April's voice was grave—"with such a heritage?"

"Now I think that's *absurd!*" He spoke with a sudden vehemence. "I must say I think the whole idea's ridiculous—there's more rubbish talked around this subject than any other—its 'heritage' indeed!" He warmed to his point. "Now look here, Petro-nilla—supposing you had to choose between being illegitimate or not being born at all—what would *you* say?"

Despite herself Mrs. Panhasard laughed.

"That's certainly a new way of looking at the matter." She smiled at him indulgently, and added as one who dismisses the topic:

"You will tell me next you hold a brief for the main sinner himself."

"And supposing I do?" He stared past her deliberately, conscious of her slight movement of repugnance. "It's always the man's fault—according to the woman!" A slight sneer hovered about his mouth and his voice went suddenly hard. "No one thinks of the other side or remarks how a woman will play to catch a man."

"Boris!" But her shocked surprise struck like a steel on flint.

"Yes—I know it sounds brutal. But, since we're talking it out, straightly, you and I—let's have the truth for once. Heaps of women will scheme to attract a man—for vanity or fun—or Lord knows what devilment! They *know* the man's tempted and . . . make themselves more tempting. Then, when he loses his head instead of losing his heart—which I presume is the original intention"—he paused, and wound up boyishly, still staring straight ahead—"it's been his silly fault from beginning up to end!"

Silence fell between them; not the quiet of friendship, but antagonistic, the primitive war of sex.

For April was at a loss. Vaguely insulted in his challenge to womankind, she nevertheless felt that an iota of justice lay in the accusation.

For although they may shriek themselves hoarse for the vaunted 'equal rights', women will rarely allow the equivalent share of *moral* responsibility.

And, as his suddenly kindled anger cooled, a feeling of quick remorse overcame the man. He gave a swift, penitent glance at the frowning face of April.

"I'm sorry,"—he cleared his voice—"we shouldn't

talk of such things—not you, and I, my dear. I'm not really unchivalrous—but somehow . . . I've been so worried lately. I believe my temper's going. Forgive me, Petronilla—I'm awfully vexed with myself. To speak to *you* like that . . . oh, my dear!"

She could not resist his hot, sad eyes, the pleading in his voice.

But all she said, with a touch of sadness, was:

"You mustn't get *too* broad-minded, boy—it . . . worries one, somehow."

Simply she held out her hand, offering a free pardon. He bent forward and kissed it reverently.

"You're so different, you know . . . so different from other women. I can't bear to hurt you." A quiver of truth lay in the words. "You seem to live in a little shrine of your own, untouched by the world—utterly true, utterly pure—holy to me—a little blue Madonna.

For a moment he laid his smooth head against her knee. His eyes were closed and the peace and stillness of the night shut them in. He felt her hand softly touch his hair, smoothing it back from his hot brow, as a mother may soothe her child.

And deep down in his heart he groaned, knowing his own folly, the hidden, secret things whereof she held no clue.

He would have given all the world to have squarely met her eyes—those eyes of deep-sea blue, with the light of forgiveness in them.

But he still sat there, speechless, his face hidden from her.

CHAPTER VII

APRIL drove away from Coddell Junction with Majendie's parting words lingering in her ears.

"I wish you'd get to know your American neighbours. I think it's too lonely for you there."

And, contented as she was to hide away in this placid back-water of life, it seemed to her at times a mistake: to leave her too much leisure for thinking on the past, blotting out the future too insistently—a meretricious peace that held a presentiment of storm.

She would have liked to have kept Majendie longer, despite the fact that his visit had lengthened to a week. And she was not a woman whom men easily pleased.

But, under the light and witty manner he assumed, she divined a nature sensitive as her own, a depth of thought and understanding far beyond his years. To a clever and analytical brain Nature had added the supreme gift of a tender heart, and leavened the whole by a curious dash of weakness, that roused in April the maternal instinct that all true women possess—that desire to shield a younger soul from the consequences bound to accrue from personal irresponsibility.

Easily influenced by his environment, with a dash of recklessness peculiar to the neurotic temperament,

he depended on the circumstances of the moment, rather than on any set scheme of life, to regulate his conduct and his beliefs.

In good hands he would make a splendid man. But in bad . . . ? She wondered how the fight would go between the power of his fine brain and a sort of moral indolence that threatened to paralyse his action.

She knew, without vanity, that her influence was great. His boyish admiration and his very real affection for her lonely self were plainly palpable. But to anything more than friendship she never gave a thought. The difference in their years, her curious present position as neither wife nor widow and the obsession of her own failure in life forbade the merest idea of a deeper sentiment.

She had rarely stooped to flirtation, and intrigue she held in horror. Her few male friends so far had been older than herself; men of settled convictions, knowing life to the core, social wayfarers, taking a quiet pleasure in friendship with a woman who, in this feverish and mercenary age, desired nothing further.

But here was a new phase that carried her back to her own early days. A man standing on the threshold of life, looking toward the future: full of enthusiasm, gifted without a doubt, wrapped round with the charm of youth, eager, acquisitive.

It seemed to her, as she drove along the dusty country road, a very precious thing, fresh as the fields beyond, this friendship that had sprung, from out of the wreck of all her hopes, swiftly into flower.

She had known Majendie for some years past, since the boy, new to London ways, had called on her through a mutual country friend; had met him every now and then, cast up on the crest of the social wave, where his handsome face and witty tongue had quickly carried him.

But during the last year the link of friendship had strengthened to become in the days of her trouble tightly rivetted, when she shrank from the curiosity—friendly or amused—of that circle in Society where she had reigned so long.

Chance had sent Majendie unwittingly to her aid at the climax which had decided her severance from her husband; and his quick brain and ready tact, at a moment when her own fame swung in the balance, had undoubtedly saved her from serious complications.

As is often the case, an hour of human tragedy had betrayed in each opposite nature the best that in it lay; when, stripped of all convention Majendie had looked deep down in another's soul; and the wonder of it, the reverence for a courage far greater than his own had stirred in him a chivalry of intention and a flash of genuine genius to meet the need for help.

Now as the roan cob swung the cart along April again realised the loneliness before her. The old house, half-buried in the woods, would seem more desolate for the loss of a gay young laugh, the silent rooms still ghostlier without the eager face. And when she came to the cross-roads, below Horrock's

Farm, a memory rose up of the Vicarage on the hill and that auspicious call that still lay unreturned.

With a feeling of relief at the temporary respite, she checked the horse in his quick trot stablewards, and, dismounting, left him in charge of the groom.

A sudden desire for movement prompted her to walk, and she set out sturdily to mount the steep incline. Halfway up she peeped in at the open door of the post-office, but Mother Tuckett was out of sight, taking her *siesta*, and the little shop was in charge of the dull-faced Giles and a swarm of inquisitive flies.

The Vicarage, she found, adjoined the green Church-yard, with a narrow gabled roof, that seemed to peer with shrewd, inquisitive eyes at her approach, curiously reminiscent of the lady of the house.

Mrs. Panhasard, groping in the creeper that hung in festoons around the blistered door, discovered at last an iron handle, which, with due caution, she proceeded to pull.

After the second effort a bell tinkled afar, succeeded by a long silence, pierced by the monotonous note of a wood pigeon hidden from view in the high trees above.

Someone in the window adjoining the porch peered out between the curtains. "Annie!" a sharp voice cried, and steps clattered across the hall.

The door was opened a few inches, and a clumsy-looking servant appeared, a small cap perched recklessly over her left ear, with a general appearance of having been dressed in haste.

In reply to April's query, she slowly backed into a

narrow hall, filled with straw hats, a collection of well-worn cloaks, a bicycle and a mature odour of cooking.

"Will ye come this way, please, m'arm?" Deprecatingly she opened a door on the left, and in nervous accents:

"Mrs. Panyard," she announced.

A party of females seated around the long table, in varying ages, from twelve years upward, turned surprised and curious eyes on the intruder.

From behind the massive tea-urn Mrs. Moneypenny rose and advanced with an air of authority.

"Mrs. . . . ?" she said interrogatively, "I didn't quite catch the name."

"Panhasard," said April clearly, as she laid her well-gloved hand into that of the formidable Vicar's wife.

"Ah, yes—from the Landslide." Mrs. Moneypenny stared fixedly at the pretty face before her. "We are just taking tea. Will you sit down? Maggie!" A girl with a fair pig-tail shot up out of her chair and, still gazing open-mouthed at Mrs. Panhasard's hat, grudgingly offered her place.

"Maggie's spilt her jam," said the next child shrilly, "look! she's covered it with her plate."

"Sh!" said an elder sister, dexterously removing the débris across the dingy table, which, innocent of damask, was covered with a permanent arrangement in shiny American cloth.

"Do you like your tea strong?" said the Vicar's wife, "and sugar?"

"Please," April pulled herself together—"it is so refreshing on a hot day like this. The dust is dreadful. Really, that road from the junction . . .!" She reached sideways for the proffered cup.

"This," said Mrs. Moneypenny, ignoring her remark, "is Mary, my eldest girl. Mary teaches in the High School at Slingsby-on-the-Hill, but is home now for the holidays."

"How do you do," Mrs. Panhasard shook hands—"it must be interesting work."

"And this is Maude." Another ungainly young woman was presented. "Maude is learning farming," the vicaress explained, "and Mildred—who helps me in the parish." A younger likeness of herself answered to the roll-call. "And Maggie—and Meta—still in the schoolroom—and Monica"—a sniff of disapproval—"who is going in for Art."

A delicate-looking girl with dark eyes coloured painfully from where she sat beside a buxom lass of seventeen summers, with red cheeks and mouse-coloured hair and a pair of wide round eyes that recalled to April the unintelligent stare of her favourite Alderney.

"*And Matilda,*" said her mother, with a softening in her voice.

"*And what do you do?*" said April pleasantly.

"Oh, Matilda does nothing," said the child with the pig-tail shrilly. "Matilda's the beauty," she explained.

"She is her father's Right Hand," said Mrs. Moneypenny severely. She gazed round compla-

cently on her quiverful. "I have brought up all my girls to be *useful*," she announced.

"Indeed?" There seemed no opening for further remark, and at this juncture the door creaked and the curate's face appeared, round and rosy, with an apprehensive glance at the lady behind the tea-urn.

"Come in, come in!—and close the door," said Mrs. Moneypenny sharply. She turned to April. "You know Mr. Puddephatt, I think—our helper in the parish."

"Yes, indeed." She pitied the young man—a mild young goat astray in such a flock of sheep!

"And how are the strawberries?" she asked him sweetly as, obedient to the hostess' sign, he drew up yet another chair to the over-crowded table.

"The strawberries—ahem, are over," said Mr. Puddephatt sadly. "No tea, thank you; I have already had some," he glanced nervously round the room. "I only called in to say that Mrs. Walker is worse and would like to see the Vicar as soon as he returns."

The ox-eyed daughter removed her blank gaze from Mrs. Panhasard's face and laid it—so to speak—heavily on the curate.

"And how do you like Coddell?" Mrs. Moneypenny asked, her shrewd eyes taking in each detail of her visitor's appearance.

"You must find it very different from—" She paused, and, as the lady addressed showed no sign of filling in the gap—"from where you come from?" she suggested.

"I do," said April sweetly; "it's so deliciously coun-

trified, quite Arcadian, in fact." She refused a slice of thick bread, with its casual hint of butter. "And I love the Landslide—it's a dear old house."

"But don't you find it lonely?" the other looked at her suspiciously. "I understand"—she cleared her throat dryly—"you are living there quite alone?"

April's proud little head went a trifle higher.

"Save for an occasional visitor," she pictured Majendie in their midst, and a dimple flickered and was suppressed near the soft curved lips. "But I have no fear of loneliness. I was born and brought up many miles from a town."

The Vicaress felt baffled—and looked it.

"Indeed?—not in this part of the country, I presume?"

"Oh, dear no," said April suavely. "This is quite new ground. Which makes it all the more exciting to explore."

She glanced across to the unfortunate maiden whose soul aspired to Art, and, with a hint of dismissing the catechism, continued: "You must find the dale a splendid place for sketching? Some of these old farms are pictures in themselves."

The girl looked up with a swift flash of pleasure, but the High-school teacher robbed her of the opening.

"Perhaps you paint yourself?—or go in for music?—or write?" she inquired. It seemed necessary that she must do something.

"I'm afraid I'm a lazy person." April, covertly amused, intercepted a glance between the curate and

"the beauty"; "I spend most of my afternoons out on the River and take my tea and a book."

"You belong to a library?" said the girl called Mary. A certain hungry look on her face awoke April's interest.

"Oh, I couldn't exist without my box from Mudie's! Are you fond of novels? You must let me lend you some."

"Mary," said her mother severely, "is generally occupied. When she is home for the holidays she teaches the younger children. It is a chance for them, you see, and prevents Mary herself from getting rusty in her work."

"But don't they have holidays, too?" April's pity was obvious.

"My dear Mrs. Panhasard," said the Vicaress loftily, "in a family like ours, we can't afford to miss our opportunities. They take their holidays when Mary returns to Slingsby."

The curate gallantly dashed into the pause that followed.

"I have been—ahem—to see Mrs. Redvers this afternoon." He looked at Mrs. Moneypenny, and added with a conscious air of duty well performed: "I delivered your message—I think, word for word."

"About the children?" the Vicaress inquired. A look of grim satisfaction came into her thin face, the bony outline accentuated by the way she wore her hair, strained back as though by force into the tight knot behind.

"Mrs. Redvers"—the curate coughed again—"con-

siders the children are still too young for Church. I explained to her, carefully, that the earlier a habit is formed—ahem—the deeper—the further——” He stuck, with a piteous glance for guidance to the Parent of the Parish.

“Exactly,” said Mrs. Moneypenny firmly; “I never heard such nonsense!”

She began to bristle under April’s amused eyes.

“The laxity of the present day”—she turned to her guest with a wave of her hand that seemed to include her subtly in the universal condemnation—“I am not surprised that the world is growing worse. Happily *here*, I have some slight authority”—a cold shiver ran down April’s back—“I conceive it my Duty to see that people come to Church, that the young receive Proper Religious Training, that parents are taught their Moral Responsibility.” She paused for breath, and added with a note of finality, “I shall call on Mrs. Redvers myself.”

“But how old are the children?” said April curiously.

“Two and a half—ahem,” said the curate—he lowered his voice. “They—happen to be twins.”

He seemed to apologise gently for the strange coincidence.

“That makes no difference,” said the Vicaress unexpectedly. “Now, *my girlsfrom the month*.”

A little sound escaped April's lips, the desperate advance guard of an invincible laugh. She turned it meekly into a cough, her cheeks suddenly red, conscious of the enormity of the offense.

"How very interesting," she managed to get out, and here, to her relief, Mr. Puddephatt rose to his feet.

"I am afraid," he announced, "I must be going." He dared a parting glance at Matilda, became pinker still, hesitated, held out a large moist hand, which Mrs. Panhasard solemnly shook and dropped, and glanced again at the Perfect Mother behind the tea-urn.

"One minute, Mr. Puddephatt. We have finished tea, I think . . ." The pig-tailed child choked over her last mouthful of bread. "Will you say grace for us?"

They all stood up and the curate, with bowed head, murmured something unintelligible into his plate.

"Amen," said Mrs. Moneypenny. "We will now go into the drawing-room."

But the prospect of a *tête-à-tête* had terrified her guest.

"I am afraid I must be off myself," she said quickly. "I have had the cob out so long." Anxious to escape she began to shake hands with one girl after another, as they clustered round the door, awkwardly blocking her path.

"Good-bye, good-bye." A feeling of suffocation, a deadly desire to laugh, hurried her on and out into the stuffy hall.

Quite suddenly Mrs. Moneypenny relaxed, her stern features twisting into a parting smile.

"Well—if you *must go*—" They reached the front door. "But I am very pleased to have met you—at last." A pause—then pensively—"Mr. Moneypenny is writing to you, I understand, about the proposed Restoration of the Porch. Most of our parishioners are interested in it"

This time April answered to the cue.

"I hope you will allow me to contribute my widow's mite?"

"Ah . . . !" said the Vicaress, with a little sigh of relief. She held her visitor's hand firmly in her own, forestalling all possibility of escape, and went on with unintentional vagueness:

"We wondered, the Vicar and I—you are so young still—and not wearing black"—she smiled, a wintry smile, at the brown tailor-made, that, for all its simplicity, betrayed a subtle elegance—"but I presume the bereavement is not recent?" and proceeded, to April's deep relief, without further pause. "Believe me, dear Mrs. Panhasard, you have our sympathy. 'The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away.' Good-bye . . . Good-bye—you must come to us when you feel your cross is too heavy to bear."

She made a vague sign with her hand, a parting benediction, as Mrs. Panhasard effected her escape.

It seemed to her as she reached the gate that the gables watched her still, piercing her thin disguise, suspecting the lie!

"Oh dear, oh dear!" she said to herself. "I'm a

widow now! I wonder what's coming next." Her honesty revolted from the thought, but reason pointed out the hopeless impossibility of repairing the lady's error.

"I couldn't stand there and explain; I really hadn't the nerve. First Boris becomes my cousin, and then this second tangle! What an awful woman she is! She belongs to the days of the Spanish Inquisition. And all those 'useful' children! Poor souls, how I pity them."

As she arrived at this charitable conclusion, a slim figure stole out from behind the churchyard wall, and she recognised the daughter who had dared to dream of Art.

"Mrs. Panhasard"—she came forward shyly, her dark eyes aglow, struggling for her breath—"I ran—after you—because—" She started again, pathetically nervous.

"I wonder . . . *would* you . . . ?" but here her courage failed her.

"I am sure I would," said April gently, with one of her sunniest smiles. "What is it, my dear?" She held out her hand to the shrinking girl.

"Oh, how good you are!" The other caught it in her own little feverish fingers that quivered with excitement.

"It's just—if you wouldn't mind—if I might come and finish a sketch I started some weeks ago—that little view of the mill from your side of the river—I began it before you came, and it's for a competition."

"Of course! Why, I should love to see you. Come to-morrow and lunch with me first? Or is the morning light better for the purpose?"

"May I? How lovely!"—she gave a childish skip of joy—"but I daren't come to lunch; I'd rather"—she hesitated—"that Mother didn't know. She doesn't like my painting, you see; she thinks it a waste of time—it isn't useful like the others." A note of wistfulness came into the girl's face. "And oh! I quite forgot. Mary says she'd love to have a book, that is, if you really *meant* that you could spare her one. Only—she'd rather—that Mother didn't know"—it seemed a household phrase, so Mrs. Panhasard thought—"it's awfully dull for her, you know, after Slingsby-on-the-Hill." Her serious face checked April's slightly amused smile. "It is good of you." She caught her breath and coughed; a short, dry cough, that shook her fragile shoulders. And at the sound pity stole into the other's eyes.

"To-morrow," she said gently, "any time you like. And we'll smuggle some novels back for Mary, won't we, dear?"

Moved by a sudden impulse she stooped and kissed the grateful little face.

For a moment the child—for such she was—clung to her breathlessly.

Then she drew back, looking up with dark, solemn eyes.

"I knew you'd be good," she cried; "you are . . . so beautiful."

And, with this unconscious tenet of her faith, turned and ran, stooping under the shadow of the ivy-covered wall, back to the peering gables and the house called home.

CHAPTER VIII

IN the open window facing the river, Lorimer Van Someren sat at his desk, staring out into the night. The air was so still that far away across the dale he could hear the bells of the village church chime slowly forth the hour. No moon shone, but a faint luminous light lay over the country-side, and above in the blue-black sky countless stars were gleaming with a curious effect of close proximity, as though, one by one, they had slid down invisible chains to peer with a bright wonder at the sleeping land below.

Over the dark woods the Milky Way slanted, a path strewn with opals from heaven to earth, and beyond the clear outline of the Plough, the Pole Star, mindful of mariners, bravely lit a torch, ignoring the garish splendour of the great shining planets.

The table where the American sat was littered over with papers, letters carefully filed, and a long schedule dotted with columns of figures in a neat clerk's hand. But his pen was laid aside by the tall reading lamp that cast a straight fan of light out onto the lawn beyond and outlined the motionless figure of the man, broad-shouldered and silent, with thoughtful face and steady eyes that were fixed on an invisible point ahead.

Once he moved, passing his hand with a gesture of

weariness across his brow, smoothing back the hair that crowned his broad forehead, hair that was fair and smooth, in curious contrast to the eyebrows, that grew thick and shaggy, and gave a look of virile determination to the grey eyes below.

He had the nervous, restless hands of his race, that almost Gallic touch that in its febrility and light humour leavens the stolidity of Anglo-Saxon origin; and now, as thought succeeded thought, he drummed with his fingers against the closed blotter, betraying the inward impatience of his mood.

For he was faced with a problem that baffled his ingenuity. For the first time in his life he had found an obstacle too large to overcome, and, although retreat wore an inglorious aspect, he wondered bitterly if it were not the sanest course to pursue.

He was a man to meet trouble squarely, a fighter born, to whom a check meant but a further impetus to reach the promised goal. But here—to use his own pregnant phrase—he was “up against” no visible foe but the idiosyncrasies of a race, blood-brother yet alien in character to his own.

Thoroughly absorbed in his work, steeped in that insatiable ambition—that desire to “make good” that seems to be the motive force of Young America to-day—his spirit was chafed raw by the perpetual irritation of a country that smiled openly at his enthusiasm and sneered at what they emphasised as his “hustling” ways.

Everywhere he found himself in the same blocked road. The sanctity of “business hours”—that closed

as though by clockwork before his invading feet—the narrow walls of “custom” that penned him in; the curious rules of Caste, that impelled a man to stand by idly and see an inferior bungle his work sooner than lose prestige by the helpful hand that would save valuable time; above all, the apathy of the young Englishman and his outlook toward work—as “a job to be got through,” a penance set merely as a means toward an end, and that end pleasure or idleness or a bid for social fame—sickened Van Someren to the depths of his ardent soul!

It was all so unlooked for, so unnecessary and futile. . . . The fingers drummed faster and faster on the desk, and his mouth set grimly into a straight, hard line, as he stared on unseeing at the dim land beyond.

He had crossed the wide belt of sea six months before, filled with such mighty hope, dreams that his practical knowledge and strong head should surely turn to golden reality.

And now . . . ? He saw himself mocked, set aside, unrequired in the maturer scheme of things.

He brought his hand down fiercely against the wood, fingers clenched together, full of hatred toward the curious force that governed the older land, the strength of its traditions, its rock of unchanging ways.

His mind skipped the intervening weeks. Once more, his sister by his side, he was stepping off the steamer with eager face turned for the first keen impression of the Europe of his dreams; filled with the spirit that fires the pioneer—to bring new methods,

an ultra-modern doctrine in his wake, that should lift the company he served out of the ruck of commonplace to the dizzy heights beyond competition.

Master of his work, knowing it not by theory alone, but by long hours of manual toil, of labour among his men; imbued to the smallest detail with the value of new inventions, the time-saving, labour-reducing outcome of the brains of many nations; utterly uninsular, eager to acquire, he came as a hardy conqueror exulting in his strength. For work was his ideal; he filled his life with it. A nobler impulse than the power of the dollar spurred him on; the feeling deep and serene that he must spend his days, the short few days of a man's life, at the height of his endeavour.

Small though the opening was he would thrust through and out, cleaving a path to fame, proving himself worthy of his desire.

A faint flush stole into his face as he slipped back to the past, piecing together the fragments of the last year's work.

His company, a young but ambitious one, had moved swiftly, throwing its feelers far, with a greed for distant lands and international schemes.

It had seemed to him the first great definite step forward when English custom had offered in a deal with a firm of old and assured standing.

Money was wanted to cement the undertaking, and for the second time in the history of his company Van Someren had come forward with financial support, believing sufficiently in its stability to risk a good share of his patrimony in the enterprise.

It was perhaps natural that the immediate result should fall short of his hopes. The English firm moved slowly; delay followed delay. The uncertainty of the mails, the economy practised in cables which America disregarded, resulted in the loss of much valuable time, whilst a want of unity in the point of view infected the correspondence with an almost hostile note.

Van Someren made up his mind. His place was in England to act as interpreter of the American method, and, still more urgent a matter, to discover the English outlook, its practical aims and requirements, and if possible to combine the two for the benefit of his venture.

With the quick thought and prompt action of his kind he settled his home affairs and sailed with his sister two months later, full of his new project.

Realising that all business was suspended during the Christmas week, he went on to Germany, following up a new invention to the city of its birth, mastered the details, and returned to find that his sister (no less practical than himself) had moved meanwhile from the costly caravanserai, where he had left her, to a quiet hotel in Bloomsbury that was nearer to his work.

Here the pair settled down to face their new life, eager as young explorers in a strange land, knit more firmly together by the loneliness of their surroundings, and later on by the disillusion that inevitably awaited the man.

For England didn't want him. He learned it

quickly with a sense of hurt surprise that was tempered by a touch of humour—it was so palpable!

They did not want new methods; they were satisfied with their own. They did not want a modicum of everlasting fame!

They wanted a quiet life—and golf on Saturdays.

To each of his suggestions, to all Van Someren preached, one reply resulted and swept the board clear.

"We don't do things like that—it's not Our Way."

He got the phrase by heart before a fortnight was out; learned to expect it by a certain pompous elevation of the senior partner's eyebrows, a large gesture of his firm white hand with the seal-ring that bore his crest and the stained forefinger sacred to the God of Nicotine.

He was in touch with no one except the office boy, a slim cockney with red hair, agile as a flea, and destined to success.

"I'll go, Sir!" was his formula, and Lorry could have hugged him: he was the only man who moved on the moment to do anything. The others all sat and thought; and then went out to lunch.

The younger partner liked him. Van Someren felt it the second week with a faint glow of hope. But in vain he tried to turn it to account.

Work to the younger partner was the usual "awful bore," balanced by what it brought in the shape of ready cash and the shortness of office hours.

That Van Someren worked on Saturdays when all the world played struck young Jessop as something

almost unpleasant—not a healthy view of life for a fellow only thirty!

"A good chap, but no sportsman," he summed him up definitely. "We must knock this nonsense out. . . ."

The other Gods in the Car resented the "American invasion", as they called it between themselves, but realised their powerlessness to eject Van Someren, who represented his company as the largest of its shareholders.

Matters had drifted on, growing daily more strained. He had gained his way on one point to lose it on another, and to stir them up to his "sense of time" was utterly impossible. To his Western ideals they seemed almost Oriental in their indifference between to-day and to-morrow.

Only that very afternoon had his dammed-up irritation nearly burst its bonds.

The postponed delivery of material important to their work had added a further check to his plans, and the fact that the order had been given to a Glasgow firm delayed the possibility of a personal interview.

Van Someren's suggestion that the senior partner should start at once for the North—since letters seemed to make no palpable impression—was met with the usual ridicule veiled in courteous terms.

Suavely it was pointed out that dignity might suffer. Jessop, who strolled in, was suggested in his place. But Jessop was off for the week-end to a yachting friend in the Solent.

The distance and expense were offered as excuses for that quick action that was Van Someren's creed.

The American picked up a Bradshaw and laughed in the great man's face; the fuss made over a few hundred miles always provoked his scorn, accustomed as he was to his own vast land.

"A *journey*—not it. I'll go if you permit. Board the night express and have a straight talk."

"To-morrow's Saturday," said the Chief, with a weary frown, "McGowan *may* be there. . ." He leaned on the doubtful note.

But the prospect of a fight had stirred the other's blood.

"I'll find him, sure. You can bet on that! Why, I once hunted a man I wanted half-way to 'Frisco!" He laughed again, boyishly, at memory of the adventure.

"But you can't do that *here*"—the Englishman rose to his feet—"not out of business hours. You'll excuse my telling you, but—er—each country has its methods, and," a sneer pointed the words, "'hustling' isn't ours. You Americans, you know, you go a shade too fast. We do our business in a somewhat different way—an old established firm—prestige—er—I think you'd better let matters take their usual course. In fact, we should prefer it."

He reached up for his hat, smoothed it lovingly, and, holding out his hand, with one of his large gestures, tempered the social wind to the shorn and alien lamb.

"Good night—I must be trotting home. My wife's

got a dinner-party——” He chuckled affably. “See you on Monday, I hope. Sorry to disappoint you, but ‘slow and sure’, you know—‘slow . . . and sure!’ That’s made England what she is.”

“*Exactly.*” Van Someren boiled over—“and when she dies it is going to be written across her heart like Queen Mary’s ‘Calais’.”

The great man stared blankly, feeling for the joke.

“Well, she’s not dying yet,” he replied at last, pausing for a moment on the threshold to light his cigarette, “she’s pretty useful,” he puffed out the smoke, “for another few years, I think,” puff . . . puff . . . “last our time, anyhow,” he decided.

“I wonder . . .?” said Van Someren grimly, as the door closed behind the slowly moving figure, “you can’t stand stock-still now-a-days,” and his smile was not one of mirth.

Now, as he recalled the scene, he wondered anew, gazing into the future with the eyes of the seer.

What was to be the outcome of the national apathy?—this living on tradition as the world moved on.

An old phrase flashed up from copy-book days: “England reigns supreme, Mistress of the Waves.”

But did she?—that was the rub. Or was it merely an echo of the past?

He thought of Germany and her big fleet growing, of the Territorial Scheme that had proved so poor a substitute for other lands’ conscription; of her Politics stained by salaried appointments, of the strikes that ruined trade, the foreign competition

He thought of the taxes levied on the Workers, in the name of the Poor for the benefit of the Rich; the dimly-recognised, steadily-growing Sex-war, with its multitude of women careless of the Law; the odd mixture of theoretical respectability and practical immorality; the unequal divorce laws and the lowering of the birth-rate.

How could she stand stock-still, relying on her past? Nature herself demanded change; England must move on.

And in a sudden wave of patriotism he turned to his own land, seeing through roseate glasses the traits he loved the best. The energy, resource, and hardy independence of the men; their instinct toward success—not by hereditary wealth, but by personal endeavour—the liberty and reverence accorded to their women that he missed everywhere in the older scheme of things.

Again with pride he recalled the last war scare, when three times the number of volunteers required pressed forward to meet the call. He thought of the Tariff laws, that gave preference to home-made goods; of the national enthusiasm, the economy of time.

Running along this train of ideas his tense mood relaxed; he felt in sympathy with the influence of the night. Peace flowed up to him from the sleeping countryside, and he became aware of the beauty of the hour.

It was as though a veil had been torn from his weary eyes and he looked for the first time at the skies warm with stars.

Somewhere far away he heard the faint sound of oars, and a breeze stole up from the river, cooling his tired brow.

He leaned forward across the desk, arms crossed, drinking it in, and in the movement dislodged his pen, that rolled with a tinkle of metal against the window frame.

Instantly in his mind memory answered the call, and another scene rose up, stirred from its hiding-place.

Once more he held for a moment's space a narrow golden ring, saw the sea-blue eyes with their subtle note of pain, and caught the faint parting smile of the lady of his dreams.

For the face had haunted him with its hint of mystery—the hurt reticence of a creature badly used.

Why should she look like that? Why should she shrink from men? Why, above all that was strange, should she buy a wedding-ring, alone, determinedly, with that shadow on her face?

The enigma never left him. He smiled to himself under cover of the darkness of the night. Women so rarely interested him, a man absorbed in work.

That a pair of gold-fringed eyes, seen for a fleeting moment in a busy London day, should prove a source of conjecture, should come again and again, asking that question he could not guess, hinting at mystery . . . he tried in vain to be free from the obsession!

She had taken off one wedding-ring and replaced it by another—standing where he did he could not fail

to notice the bewildering transaction—had paid for it herself and walked alone from the shop.

The elements of romance, as yet hardly alive in him, strove persistently for a clue to guide his search.

Why should she want another ring, seeing she had the one? Why should she buy it herself, usurping the lover's prerogative? Was she wife or maid, or acting a subtle part?

At once he dismissed the theory of an underhand proceeding. Her pure and truthful eyes were strangers to deceit. And the little ungloved hand that his own had lightly touched—he had felt an insane desire to take it in his clasp.

She called out of some obscure and deep source of distress to all the manhood in him, demanding his protection.

For her face had haunted him, ever since that day. Suddenly it would steal between him and his work, the blue eyes raised to his, the lashes curling back; that wistful beauty of hers, that seemed so shy a thing, fearful of something he could not guess, like a wood creature trapped.

Often he would dismiss it with a sense akin to shame, a furtive annoyance at weakness so rare in his ordered life. But to-night under the stars he lost himself in the vision, turning from his own perplexity to wonder at another's.

The breeze died down again as swiftly as it had come, sinking into the feathery silence of sleeping leaf and flower. And again he heard in the still night

air the rhythmic beat of oars. Someone was rowing hard, striving with the current, lost in the mist that shrouded the river-banks.

He listened to it, filled with a lazy wonder at the lateness of the hour, and suddenly it ceased, with a sharp, grating noise, as though the side of the boat had scraped the landing-stage.

Straining his ears in sudden attention, he caught the sound of a step, quick and light, on the garden path below.

A curious feeling of excitement swept into his brain, a knowledge that something was coming to him, from out of the heart of night.

He sprang to his feet and thrust the window wider, standing on the step that led down to the lawn. As he strained his eyes he could see something move, a shadowy form emerge, head bent a little forward, as though it ran toward him up the steep slope.

The next moment it was caught in the narrow fan of light.

"Is anyone there?" cried a sweet voice breathlessly. And as he answered, amazed, with a boyish note: "Hello!" he heard the little sob of her breath in quick-drawn thankfulness.

And there before him stood the lady of his dreams: bare-headed, sprinkled with evening dew, one foot innocent of slipper, her skirt torn by brambles; forlorn, yet subtly conscious of the humour of her plight.

"I'm so sorry," she panted, blue eyes raised to his—"so sorry to disturb you——"

Then she essayed to laugh, a desperate little attempt, that roused him from his dream:

"But thieves have got into my house, and I don't know what to do!"

CHAPTER IX

FROM the commencement it was evident to Van Someren that, however deeply the lady's face was engraved upon his memory, the recognition was in no wise mutual.

He was simply the nearest neighbour, to whom a sudden necessity drove her for protection. Her mind was engrossed with the problem before her, and the thought of Mary Tuckett sleeping the sleep of the just with the red-cheeked Lottie in a wing of the lonely house.

But afterward, when April reviewed the situation, she realised that she could hardly have found a more capable ally.

For, wasting no time in futile explanation, Van Someren turned to a drawer in his desk, and, loading a small revolver that lay within, slipped it into his pocket with the nonchalant attitude of his race, and announced himself ready to depart.

Here he became aware of his visitor's curious plight, one foot in a mud-stained slipper, the other without its fellow.

"You can't go like that——" He moved toward the door. "It isn't safe—you might lame yourself for life."

The colour stole up into her pale cheeks.

"I lost it," she explained, "getting into the boat. The bank was so muddy, and I didn't dare go back. I thought I heard steps behind me." She laughed again, more naturally this time. "I was *terrified!*" she confessed, with a smile at her own folly.

"I sure don't wonder," he nodded his head, arrested by her words. "It wanted a cold nerve to venture out at all! Most women would have pulled the bed-clothes over their heads and shouted aloud for help."

"I *did* think of it." Her blue eyes danced. "And then of the stable-bell. But, as it happened, I had let my groom go home that very afternoon for his sister's funeral. It was no use rousing the maids; they sleep in a distant wing. So I slipped out by the landing door, meaning to reach those cottages at the cross-ways, and then I remembered your house was just down the river. I thought it the better plan. It's one of those cases in which a woman feels lost without a man—even a suffragette, I should imagine!"

"I'm vurry glad." He ignored her little joke, his brain filled with the obvious needs of the moment. "Excuse me a minute." He vanished, quickly to reappear, a pair of tennis-shoes dangling from his hand.

"I wonder if these would do? They're what my sister wears about the garden. Or, I could go up and wake her and get some stronger ones?"

"Oh, please don't think of it. I wouldn't disturb her for worlds. It's very kind of you—I hope she won't mind?"

"Gracious, no!" At his hearty voice she seated

herself in one of the big arm-chairs and drew off distastefully the mud-stained slipper that survived.

But here, to her surprise, he knelt down before her, loosened the laces of the shoes, and proceeded in the most matter-of-fact way to act as lady's maid.

"Allow me . . ." he held one out toward her. It was narrow, of American make, a shade small even for April's little foot.

Nothing daunted, Van Someren reached up for a paper-knife that lay on the desk behind him, inserted it neatly in the heel, and gave a sigh of relief as the impromptu shoe-horn nobly answered its purpose.

"That's good—now the other." He tied the last bow, and rose to his feet with a glance at her somewhat amused face.

"Oh, I'm well broken to harness!—had to look after Sister, you see, on the trip across. Is that comfortable?"

He extended a helping hand to raise her to her feet—so naturally that she accepted his aid. And, as their fingers met, a thrill of exultation raced through the man, the curious triumph of knowing that she relied on him, that once again it was fated she should need his strong protection.

Little did April guess what was passing in his mind. Still highly strung with the night's strange adventure the unconventionality of her visit lay dormant in her brain, and the easy, practical attitude of the young American provoked a sense of security, an unconscious good-fellowship that soothed her tired nerves.

"They're just a shade tight." She answered his question simply, as they passed out together onto the lawn below. "But I'm far too grateful for them to bear them the slightest grudge. What became of the slipper, by the way?"

"It's in my pocket—quite safe. You'd better take my arm."

For she stumbled at the edge of the path, blinded by the quick change from the lamp-lit room to the darkness without.

But, ignoring his suggestion, she moved cautiously forward. The humour of the proceeding suddenly flashed across her, as she thought of Majendie and his parting words of advice. What would he say, if he could see her now, in the American girls' shoes, wandering hatless through the night with her neighbour in his garden? This was "knowing them" with a vengeance! And here she slipped again with a little involuntary "Oh!" of dismay as she caught at a prickly shrub to save herself from falling.

Instantly firm fingers closed around her elbow, and an encouraging voice sounded in her ears.

"This way—to the right. We're nearly there."

"Thank you—it's so dark, isn't it?" She gave herself up hopelessly to the situation, repressing a faint desire to laugh as they went on arm-in-arm.

"Here's the landing-stage. Now three steps down."

He counted them carefully as they descended, the faint upward rise of intonation, that betrayed his origin, plainly audible—that counter-note to the Eng-

lish voice that falls a demi-tone at the end of every phrase.

"Please stay here."

The hand left her arm and she heard him step down into the boat.

"Now." He reached up and without further ado lifted her gently in.

"You all right?" Before her astonishment at being treated like a child had passed away: "The seat's all wet," he commented ruefully—and stripping off his coat, laid it carefully down as an impromptu cushion. "There . . . is that better?" He ignored her quick remonstrance. "I'll row easier like this. Do you want to steer? Or would you rather, perhaps—leave it all to me?"

"Oh, no." She gathered up the ropes as he pushed the boat out into mid-stream.

But the words lingered in her ears, with a curious sense of pleasure.

It seemed to her tired spirit that here indeed was help: that the burden of responsibility—that weight she had borne for years—was lifted for a breathing-space from off her weary shoulders.

As the strong stroke of the oars swept them with the current, she leaned back happily, watching those nervous capable hands creep out of the gloom toward her and pull back powerfully as the boat leaped in response; felt rather than saw the grey eyes under their shaggy brows absorbing her, kindly, gravely, with a curious insistence, too full of stern respect to rouse her resentment.

Then a sharp bump brought her back to a material world.

"I'm so sorry!" In the dark she coloured with annoyance. "I'm afraid I wasn't steering; I've run you into the shallows."

"My fault!" He laughed, a shade consciously, as he remedied the mistake. "These trees are so misleading—I think the water is deeper along the left bank."

He could not well explain that his thoughts were far away from his work, all his keen attention riveted for the time on her half-hidden hand, wondering if "it" were there—the narrow golden band—lost in a fold of the coat upon her knee.

As she bent forward, intent upon her task, she pulled the left rope sharply to bring the boat's head round, and in the dim starlight he caught the gleam of the ring he sought. And again the old problem rose, baffling his ingenuity, adding a keener zest to the night's strange adventure.

Mystery seemed to hang about her as a veil, haunting the sweet, uplifted face, where her hair, wet with the heavy mist, shrouded the eyes beneath—those thoughtful eyes, that gazed so steadily past him, watching the river banks. Her shoulders drooped slightly, as though in weariness. He could see her slender neck, with its hint of pride, its smooth and delicate grace, outlined against the dark background of the stream. To a more imaginative mind she would have suggested a spirit of the woods, some

Dryad escaped from the heart of an oak, bare-headed, subtly sweet. But in Van Someren's thoughts she held a deeper place. Unconsciously she embodied the shy, far-off ideal, that every man somewhere must hide within his soul. She woke old dreams of youth in a new wonderment: the exquisite uncertainty of a boy's first love. And, against his reason, his shrewd common-sense, the knowledge came to him with every breath he drew that here was no stranger, no mere friend-to-be, but the One Woman at last, the help-mate of his life.

Above them the stars gleamed through the silver haze of mist, glistening on wet willow and feathery crown of rush; about them lay the silence of the warm summer night, with only the rhythmic beat of oars and the ripple of the stream.

It seemed to Van Someren a charm that nought could break, a stillness far removed from the busy haunts of men, this wordless communion with another's soul.

But to April it held but a passing spell of peace. Her faint meed of gratitude touched no border line of love. She rested body and mind only to stir again to the old sense of duty, to face the danger of the hour.

The perpetual need for stern control, the ceaseless apprehension that had been her share for many a weary year, wearing away her youth and nerves, keeping her ever on the alert, had grown into a habit as strong as life itself. And now, as ever, it stirred her from her dream. With a sharp physical movement,

pulling herself together, she threw off her lassitude and sweet forgetfulness.

"I had better tell you, I think, what has happened up to now."

Van Someren started at the brisk sound of her voice, waking abruptly out of fairy-land.

"Sure." He nodded his head, forcing himself to attention.

"I think there are two thieves; but I can't, of course, be certain—it is so difficult to locate a noise in the dark."

She leaned forward, peering past him at the banks, steering carefully, as her words ran on.

"We locked up the house in the usual way at ten and then went to bed; my two maids and myself. As it happened, I couldn't sleep"—the occurrence was not so rare as her light tone suggested—"and at last I felt sure I heard someone or something move in the room under mine. So I stole out on tiptoe and looked down from the gallery into the hall below. There was a faint gleam of light under the dining-room door. Then, as I stood there holding my breath, I caught the unmistakable noise of a file . . ." She paused to guide the boat past the little island where once before she had gone aground.

"What did you do then?"

The tell-tale dimple peeped out from its hiding-place.

"Ran back into my room and double-locked the door."

Van Someren laughed aloud; but his eyes betrayed

his admiration. The rare honesty of the answer swept away the last germ of suspicion that rankled in his heart.

"Then I began to think it out. There's a silver-cupboard, you see, between the dining-room and pantry, with a door that opens into each. They're locked at night and my maid takes away the keys. Oddly enough the thought of a burglary has never crossed my mind. In town, you see—" She stopped and bit her lips.

"It doesn't happen often, I suppose," he finished the broken phrase.

"No." She went on hurriedly, conscious of her slip. "I couldn't get to the servants—they sleep above the kitchen, with a separate staircase—you have to cross the hall. But the house is built on a slope, and the landing-door at the back opens on to another level with a short flight of steps. So I dressed quickly and got out that way and down to the boat-house below. That's the whole adventure—as far as it goes."

"Not a very pleasant one for a girl alone." He saw her little start and went on quietly. "By the way, my name's Van Someren—Lorimer Van Someren. But perhaps you know it already?" His eyes were on her face.

At the somewhat obvious hint, she gave a quick frown. For the first time she felt ashamed of her borrowed plumes, a strange reluctance to masquerade under his steady gaze.

"And mine is . . . Panhasard. Mrs. Panhasard."

To her intense surprise he laughed aloud. And at the sound he saw her stiffen, the head, with its wind-tossed wealth of hair, raised with a touch of dignity on the slender neck; an indescribable air of aloofness seemed to enfold her, as she announced in a cold, clear voice:

"I believe we are nearly there."

He dashed into explanation of his sudden merriment. "I was thinking how strange it is that we have . . . never met!" Again he smiled to himself, hugging his secret close. "Of course you don't understand, but the fact is, my sister talks of you from morning until night—your name is a household word! And I am just realising that it's *you*, with the cart and brown harness and the roan cob that shies at every milestone! You see, I know all about you."

Her face cleared and she echoed his happy laugh. "Your sister rides, doesn't she? I pass her every day—in a grey riding-habit. The interest is mutual!"

"That's Sister. She's mad on hunting here in October. But I won't let her out as yet without a leading-rein—it's a sore point at home—but I'm very firm. You see, it's like this"—his voice went suddenly grave—"I'm Father and Brother, too—there's no one else but me. Our parents are both dead and we've lived together ever since Sister left boarding-school."

She looked up at him sympathetically. "Of course—the responsibility—I understand that. But it must be nice for you to have her always with you."

"Surely." His face softened, the firm mouth tender. "I couldn't leave her in New York by herself.

She'd just have been too lonesome without her household tyrant. But it's a bit dull for her when I am up in town, with no play-fellows."

He paused, catching her sudden gesture.

"Is this the place?" and slowed down to enter the narrow boat-house.

Noiselessly he shipped his oars and sprang out on the bank, fastened up the boat, and felt for his revolver.

At the sight of the small, deadly weapon Mrs. Panhasard gave a little shiver, which did not escape the keen, grey eyes of the man.

"You'd better stay here I think whilst I reconnoitre."

But she stepped ashore quickly, spurning the suggestion.

"I'd sooner come with you. Besides, you don't know the house."

"I think you're better here." His voice was masterful. For a moment they stood there facing each other and he became aware of a difference in her expression—of a new touch of dignity that not all her hatless air of disarray could lessen.

"I prefer to come." She was changed under his frowning eyes to a woman accustomed to rule, to be obeyed by men, and all his native obstinacy rose at the sight of her slight smile, as, disregarding his wish, she moved past him, head erect, to face the lonely path.

"In any case"—his voice matched her own—"I go first."

Here were two wills, equally strong, suddenly at war.

She paid him no attention, but walked on doggedly, for all her courage feeling her heart beat a trifle faster as the shadowy trees closed in about them.

Then she felt a firm hand on her arm.

"Mrs. Panhasard . . ."

The name sounded oddly in her ears, brought her back with a start to a sense of her new position.

"Well—if you like," she said weakly; and then she gave a low laugh of amusement at herself.

"Thank you." He was past her, walking noiselessly, a tall, broad-shouldered figure, blotting out the light.

"There are three steps," she whispered, "and then a little gate."

He obeyed her directions, and now, as if to aid them, the moon rose wanly over the scene. By its light, to his surprise, he saw the curious formation of the ground: the cliff rising ahead fringed with the belt of firs, the shelving sharp descent where the old house clung and the flight of uneven steps cut in the hillside that would bring them at the rear of the building level with the bedrooms.

No light shone from the windows anywhere. The silence seemed a heavy thing, palpable and dense. But as they paused to consider their plans under the lea of the wall a faint, faint sound broke on their ears, the unmistakable grating noise of a window being forced up.

"Stay here!" Van Someren's face was alight with

the glow of coming battle. "Don't move, please!" He was gone with quick noiseless strides in the direction of the lawn.

She waited breathlessly, her senses on the alert.

"Hands up!" She heard the cry. Then quickly in succession the revolver rang out twice; then a pause that frightened her more than all the sounds together.

Forgetful of his injunction, April started in pursuit, but before she could reach the grass Van Someren reappeared.

"It's all right, Mrs. Panhasard; hope you weren't frightened. One of them's got away, but I've winged the other fellow."

He spoke as cheerfully as though he had bagged a partridge.

"Is he hurt?—badly, I mean?" Her woman's instinct got the better of her judgment.

To her surprise she found she was trembling in all her limbs, the inevitable reaction of over-strained nerves.

"No, no." He answered her quickly, divining her distress. "Only a touch in the leg. You'd better come in, I think. You must be awfully tired with all your exertions."

He blamed himself absurdly at the sight of her white face, as they made their way along to the open French window.

But at this moment comedy brought the stimulus she needed.

For from a room above a lusty country throat

shrilled out wrath and terror through the still night air.

"Help! Help! Murder! Fire! !"

Mary Tuckett, in curling-pins, was waking the countryside. Beside her Lottie's round red face shone like the Harvest moon.

"There's a MAN!" The housemaid's voice rose in a shrill crescendo and a dramatic arm "robed in white samite" waved from the window, pointing at Van Someren.

April gave a shaky little laugh.

"It's all right, Mary! Lottie, do stop screaming," she called up to them from the lawn, where she stood. But no whit pacified the babel of sound increased.

"Oh, mum, *do* come in afore we're all on us murdered in our beds."

"Nonsense!" April's voice was severe. "It's all over now, there's nothing at all to fear. Get your clothes on, and come down to me."

At the quiet note of command, the two heads withdrew, but not before Mary's last remark had reached the pair below.

"'Tis the furriner from oop t'riverside. What be he a-doing here at this hour o' night?"

"I'm afraid my character's gone." Van Someren lit the lamp, as April followed him into the dining-room.

"You'd better have something to take." He moved across to the sideboard. "What's this, whiskey?"—and poured some in a glass.

"No, thanks"—as he brought it across—"I'm quite

all right, really." Then, as he insisted: "I never touch spirits. But do have some yourself." She smiled back bravely, still a little pale, but sure of her control.

He watched her, marvelling at her quick recovery, stirred anew to deep admiration.

She looked so fragile, so utterly feminine, as she lay back buried in the deep arm-chair, he could not guess that the life she had led had brought her courage up to finer heights of endurance than many a strong man's.

"Well, here's luck!" He raised his glass, his eyes on her face. "And now I must go and see to your visitor, whom I left cursing volubly and holding onto his leg. I won't be gone long—and here comes the chorus . . ."

For the door opened to admit Lottie's buxom form, followed by Mary Tuckett, still tugging at the last refractory button of her tight cotton frock.

They listened, open-mouthed, to April's explanation, Mary insisting "it *had* to be, on account of that there magpie."

"It always brings misfortune, mum, and thank God t'was no worse—I see it myself twice, flying across the lawn—and yesterday, in me tea-cup, there was a stranger to the 'ouse—didn't I tell you, Lottie?" She paused for confirmation; then, suddenly practical, announced a curiosity to see the wounded man and help the foreign gentleman who had "behaved that clever."

Lottie, more timorous, decided it was her

"bounden duty" to explore the silver cupboard, and, as April sat there quietly, in obedience to the American's wish, glad indeed to rest her weary limbs, vague sounds of tribulation reached them from the lawn.

Back came Van Someren, hot and tired, bearing the latest news.

The wounded man was no other than the bereaved groom—a Londoner whom April had taken on a written testimony.

Mary Tuckett was with him, improving the shining hour, in the stables, where he now lay until the Doctor's advent.

"So I'd better be moving, and bring him right away. You go to bed, Mrs. Panhasard. I'll see to everything. Is the quick way to the village round by Horrock's Farm?"

He stood there, strong and capable, looking down at her.

"Trouble? Not it!" in answer to her protest—"to tell you the truth I'm just enjoying myself! It isn't often one gets the chance of an adventure—and this one"—he smiled, subtly conscious of more than she was aware—"is the best I've come across for many a long day."

He shook hands warmly, waving aside her thanks. "You can't beat it unless you cheat!" he cried back from the door.

CHAPTER X

MARY TUCKETT was annoyed. Justly so, she felt.

It was not every day--so she explained to an admiring village audience—that “thieves break through and steal where moths and rust corrupt.”

A little doubtful of the quotation she went on hurriedly:

“Not that we’ve many moths up at t’ Landslide—too much ‘bitter apple’ for that!—and the missus’ furs safe in ‘coal storage.’”

But it certainly was disheartening in a place “where nothing happened” to find that the melodrama had but a single act.

For Mrs. Panhasard declined to prosecute. The silver had been recovered and the fact that the injured man still lay in hospital (whither the doctor had promptly removed him with the help of the Slingsby ambulance) and that in view of his fractured leg he would probably “go short”—as Mary expressed it—“to the end of his born days”, seemed to point a moral of sufficient warning to others.

But under this April hid a far stronger motive. She did not desire publicity at this juncture in her life.

Van Someren, listening to her reasons, accepted her decision without further comment. He held no

brief in favour of supporting the British law. The doctor, a busy man, commended her attitude. He had neither time nor desire to appear at the Slingsby Assizes, and if "the widow"—as she was believed to be by all the village gossips—shrank from unwelcome notoriety, as a man he approved her conduct, as a physician marked the signs on her face of nervous wear and tear.

Despite the servants' talk the two men interested helped April to hush up the affair, and Mary was deprived of long-drawn-out excitement. She found a certain consolation in the freedom it allowed her to impart secretly her version of the matter: how she had stood by her mistress' side throughout the "'ail of bullets", that "might ha' shot anyone anywhere in the dark!" and, braving the possibility of the wounded man's fury, had flown on her errand of mercy "to see if the corpse had stirred".

The fact that he was a Londoner, unknown to Cod-dell fame, though depriving the burglary of some local excitement, provided satisfaction in a new reminder of the iniquity of Town.

The Vicar heard of it and hurried round to inquire, but, under April's skilful lead, discovered on his return that the talk had chiefly dwelt on a certain rare edition of à Kempis that had fetched a fabulous sum at Christie's that same week. He soothed his wife's irritation at the barren lack of detail by producing—with the gentle shamefacedness that invariably accompanied his poor attempts to beg—a generous subscription from the lady for the restoration of the Porch.

The only practical outcome of the whole lurid adventure was the installation of yet another Tuckett to attend the roan cob; a tall, shy youth, with an eye for Lottie's charms.

Also the advent of The Dog; small in itself, yet filling its chosen place in April's story of life as an insignificant atom of marble may complete a pavement of mosaic.

The dog arrived this wise, on a sunny afternoon:

The Vicar had departed, a loaned book in one hand, shabby hat in the other. He had a habit of walking bare-headed down the lanes. It seemed he blessed God, outside his parish Church, continually, for the sight of a tree or a child's happy face, dreaming his way along through a world of virgin green, as pure and simple a gentleman as God, perhaps, required.

The villagers all loved him with a slight lack of respect—the sort of pitiful love that cripples learn to know. In all material trouble they went to the Vicar's wife; they ran her, so to speak, as an emergency agent of Heaven, expected to produce coal, sharp advice, baby clothes and soup.

But when Death touched the cottage with a remorseless hand, they barred the door in the good woman's face and wailed aloud for the Vicar. He knew by instinct the words of consolation, prayed with them as they understood, on the same human level. Their quiet contempt for a man who suffered daily nagging, whose absent-mindedness aroused open smiles and sneers, vanished in the hour of

grief when he towered far above them on a pinnacle of faith.

For he had that rare gift that is known as "vocation." He lived for his beliefs and lived also in them; far removed from the spirit of the day, lost in a world of trust and confidence that was a perpetual thorn in the side of his practical wife.

She clung to the tenets of a pessimistic creed. Hell-fire to her burned clear as incandescent. She did not wish salvation for any but "the Good," nor that the Lord should deign to stoop to unrepentant sinners.

Eustace Moneypenny was broader in his views, holding serenely that all men were brothers, that Sinner and Saint alike should look to Paradise.

The pardoning of the thief upon the cross was to him the visible token of divine compassion, divine redemption from sin.

To her his crucifixion beside the Lord was chiefly a punishment he had earned by evil deeds, a physical scourge to mark his flesh and teach him humility. Only by suffering should he be allowed in Heaven and even there, in her heart of hearts, she resented the chance of a meeting.

Between her and her husband was fixed this wide gulf—that human understanding of his she labelled "laxity."

Perhaps he had walked bare-headed too long in God's sunshine, dreaming of infinite mercy, infinite compassion.

To-day as he paced along, down the narrow, dusty

'lane, his gentle mind was filled with his new parishioner. His facility for divining the sorrows of mankind had pierced the outward shield of April's world-wise ways. He saw deep down in the smiling eyes the shadow of a grief, that questioning of a soul perplexed that had caught Van Someren's pity.

On he went bare-headed, his eyes fixed on the trees ahead, where the cottage roofs at the cross-ways added a note of red. A lark rose up from the corn in soaring flight on flight, opening its heart of song like a chalice to the sky. The vicar followed it dreamily in its course. Now it was but a speck against the sapphire heavens. Instinctively he paused, his old eyes straining upward; and at that precise moment he heard a shout behind, a clatter of running feet, and something large and woolly and unexpected took him in the rear.

Over he went, hat and all, scrambling in the dust, and lay there for a moment prostrate in amazement; until a small hand was slipped beneath his arm and a panting voice exclaimed:

"Oh—I *am*—so sorry! I hope you're not hurt?"

Somewhat cautiously with this assistance he rose to his knees, mechanically gathering up the dusty clerical hat.

Then he became aware of a large sheep dog, sitting squarely before him, astonished as himself. Aware, too, of a girlish face, with bright eyes that struggled between ready laughter and tears, bending over him with solicitude, striving to explain.

"He didn't mean it, *really*," the sing-song voice

went on with a lilt and slight drawl that suggested the Southern States—"he slipped his collar, you see, and then he bolted from me, straight down the road, as slick as he could go. If you hadn't stopped dead he'd have got past all right "

She gave a sigh of relief, as realising his position the vicar rose to his feet, surveying his new friend with humorous, kindly eyes.

"My dear young lady"—he almost purred as the vigorous little hands began to brush the dust from off his whitened coat—"I quite understand how it happened. I had no business to stop—like that, suddenly—without sounding a horn!"

She laughed at his metaphor and followed it up promptly.

"And *his* brake I reckon wasn't in working order! —was it, old boy?" she patted the great dog's head—"you're one of those dear old clumsy things that every one calls 'well-meaning.' "

Thereupon she fastened the collar more tightly round his neck, slipped on the leash and, grasping it firmly, held out her other hand.

"I do hope we're forgiven?" she said prettily, "we're sure repentant, both of us."

The vicar protested gaily there was nothing to forgive, adding with what—for him—was a rare touch of curiosity:

"Your face seems somehow familiar. Haven't I seen you—occasionally—at Church?" And a twinkle came into the old eyes as he modified the statement.

"That's so. I do come . . . sometimes. But it's

a long walk, you know. We live at Riverside—my brother and I. We came here in May."

"Dear me, dear me," he waxed apologetic. "I remember now my wife told me—several times I fear. I will come and call if I may at the very next opportunity. This is a scattered parish and the distances are great . . ."

"Sure"—she broke in on his lengthy explanation—"we'd be vurry pleased, Brother and I—to see you."

"And you'll have this ruffian chained?"

He laid his hand caressingly on the dog's shaggy coat; including in his love for humanity the faithful friends of man.

"Oh, that's for Mrs. Panhasard," she nodded her head wisely. "He's not mine, you see, he only arrived to-day. But Brother's been looking around for something . . . big and important in dogs," her lips parted in a merry smile, shewing her white teeth. "Something that looks fierce and isn't—to keep off thieves, you know. I'm taking him there now, or at least I was, before he took you on his way."

They laughed simultaneously.

"Well, good-bye," he raised his shabby hat as she retraced her steps towards the distant gate of Mrs. Panhasard's house.

"What a dear old thing!" she said to herself. "I'm so glad, pup, that you found him for me. Heigho!—it's a dull life . . ." for, despite the fact that they had thankfully fled from the heat-wave in town, she felt her exile more in the quiet countryside. "Now, I wonder how I shall like your new mistress? She

looks a perfect peach, sitting in that high cart!—but Brother said very little, only that she was nice. And now I come to think of it most Englishwomen seem ‘nice’—nothing more and nothing less—you just stop there . . .”

Arrived at the long drive, she peered in doubtfully. “I wish Lorry would come—the train must be late again. How dark it looks and lonely. I’m sure it must be haunted. We’ll just go a few steps, pup, and sit down and wait. I’d want a nerve to go up alone and explain who I am.”

She settled herself comfortably on the root of a giant lime, gazing upward to watch the bees above, searching for honey among the scented flowers.

The sheep dog squatted down and panted, apparently for amusement, for the cool beneath the trees forbade the thought of heat. Presently he moved nearer, great trustful eyes fixed on the girl’s face, and thrust a cold black nose forward on her knee.

“It’s like a pickled walnut,” she told him solemnly—but you *are* about the dearest old pup that ever happened.”

She played with his soft ears, every now and then glancing back at the gate, feeling the silence weigh heavily upon her.

Then somewhere far away came the sound of a child’s voice singing as it approached, with an under-current of trotting hoofs, along the dusty lane.

“Listen!” she raised her head, trying to catch the words, and as the rider neared them smiled at the quaint song.

"If a pig wore a wig,
 What should we say?
 Treat him as a gentleman
 And say 'Good day!'

If his tail chanced to fail,
 What should we do?
 Send him to the tailoress
 And get one new"

A grey pony, sedate and fat, swerved round the corner, mounted by a boy in a sailor-suit with a dark gipsy face.

"Hullo!" He reined up his steed, staring at the girl.

His first intention of warning intruders off his liege lady's land vanished as he surveyed the pair before him.

"That's a nice dog," he said politely, encouraged by her smile. "What's his name?"

"He hasn't got one yet. He's new, you see."

"A puppy?" His little air of knowledge amused Miss Van Someren.

"We—ll," she drew the word out with her faint musical drawl, "not exactly. About the same age in dogs, I guess, as you and me."

He realised instantly she was bent on teasing him.

"Ah—a good age," he approved.

Her laugh rang out, fresh and sweet and good to hear.

"He's for the lady who lives here"—she explained the matter—"to frighten away thieves. I'm waiting for Brother to come and take him up to the house."

"Oh!" A light of sudden joy illumined the Bosun's face. "Is your brother the man that shot the burglar in the leg?" It was plain he revelled in the adventure. "How fine! And he's coming here—now?—to-day?"

With a deft movement he wriggled down to the ground, drew the single rein over his arm, thrust his small hunting-crop under the other and approached a step nearer.

"I'd like to see him," he added ingratiatingly.

"So you shall," said his new friend, "if you wait a bit." She moved closer to the tree. "There's a corner here," pointing to the smooth root and drawing her skirt aside.

Down he sat beside her.

The grey pony cropped contentedly at the grass.

"D'you think . . ." The Bosun fidgeted, his gipsy face turned eagerly towards Miss Van Someren, "d'you think he'd let me fire it off, myself, one day?"

"Rather!" She liked his spirit. "Haven't you got a gun?"

"No," he dug his heel moodily into the earth, "Skipper won't let me, and Darling's always afraid."

"Who's Skipper?" she asked him lazily.

"Skipper? Oh, he married Darling, you know."

The matter seemed slightly more involved.

"And Darling?" she persisted in her sweet drawling voice.

The boy looked up surprised.

"She's my mother, of course."

"And what's *your* name?" she went on serenely with her catechism.

"Clifton—Eric Stanhope Clifton. But I'm called mostly 'Bosun.' I'm going to be a sailor, you see. At least, I'm not *quite* sure."

"Would you like to go to sea?" Her eyes were fixed on that strange white lock that gleamed in the dark hair, as he pushed his sailor cap to the back of his small head.

"Well, I used to think I should. But since Alan's big brother has come home, I'd rather be a soldier, just like him. That's why," he raised earnest eyes to the girl's face, "I want to fire that gun." He broke off, jumping to his feet. "Here he comes!" he shouted. "Hurrah!"

For, absorbed in each other, they had failed to see a bicycle bearing down upon them, a streak of silver that caught the sunlight above the dusty hedge.

"Hello!" Lorry turned the bend and sprang to the ground beside them. "There you are, Honey!—the train was mad late. Who's the new beau, this time?"

"This is Eric Stanhope Clifton," said Miss Van Someren gravely, "generally known as 'the Bosun,' I am told."

"Vurry glad to meet you." The pair shook hands. "You going our way?" He gave the diminutive Nimrod a leg-up into the saddle, and the odd trio set out together up the drive, the girl recounting merrily her adventure with the vicar.

Van Someren walked between the pair, one hand

pushing his bicycle, the other tucked in his sister's arm, while the small boy stole admiring glances at his hero.

The dog followed sheepishly at the end of the leash, with the apologetic droop of his kind. Every now and then he threw his head up and snuffed at the air, wondering in his perplexed soul where they were taking him.

"Come along, pup, and look spry if you can!" his present mistress adjured him as they neared the house. "You're more like a thief yourself than anything *I* ever saw."

"He'll cheer up bye and bye," said Lorry consolingly—"he's just a bit lonesome in a strange land. Now, then, here we are."

He rang the bell, straightening his shoulders, repressing the excitement he felt—the longing to see again the lady of his dreams.

"Mrs. Panhasard in?" Miss Van Someren asked nervously, as the trim Lottie answered the door.

"Yes, miss—in the garden—will you please come this way?"

The small boy had clattered round to the stables, quite at home by now in his new friend's house.

They followed the maid silently, through the empty hall and the pleasant room beyond with its bowls of flowers, its books and other instinctive signs of a cultured woman's taste.

The girl was a trifle pale. Despite her high spirits and gay mannerism, she suffered acutely from shyness, courageously concealed, and a first call was al-

ways a subtle penance to her, particularly among strangers in a strange and alien land.

She glanced at her brother, wondering a little at the light upon his face. His eyes shone and he moved with a quick and eager step.

"She must be verry nice," she whispered to herself, slightly consoled by his evident elation. "I do hope she's not as stiff as Mrs. Bounderby."

For the Senior partner's wife had been a sore infliction.

"Come along, pup!" The dog was dragging on his leash, as they passed down the steps from the drawing-room to the verandah.

"Mr. and Miss Van Someren."

The names rang sonorously in their ears as Lottie stood aside, with a demure glance at the new visitors.

April rose from a deck-chair, a smile upon her face, dainty and fresh and self-possessed, in her plain linen gown. She wore a garden-hat of coarse burnt straw, wreathed round with dandelions and fluffy white clocks, and save for the little diamond watch, that hung from its slender chain, no jewellery but the plain gold ring marred the simplicity of her dress.

Nevertheless there clung about her an air—unmistakable, fine—of a woman of the world; conscious of a position that no one could gainsay, utterly at ease and yet dignified.

She moved to meet her guests with cordial outstretched hand.

Miss Van Someren, with a nervous smile, awaited her brother's introduction. Alas for ceremony—for

unrehearsed effect! For the dog, trailing behind, suddenly stiffened his ears; a row of bristles rose upon his back; he gave one deep-toned growl and a great bound forward as the black cat stirred to attention beneath the table for tea.

At the sudden unlooked for impetus down went Miss Van Someren, like the vicar, on both knees. Away sped the cat, a black streak of fear! The leash slipped from the girl's hands and caught round the table-leg; cups and plates went headlong with an avalanche of cakes.

Never was seen a more complete confusion as the American girl struggled up, scarlet to the eyes. Her brother had dashed away after the main offender, who, tugging himself free, was off in hot pursuit of the cat.

April, the first alarm over, was speechless with sudden laughter and Lottie had flown back to repair the disaster.

Then from the room within came the climax to the scene. A sound of light steps and the Bosun's childish voice:

"You there, Mrs. Pan?—I've brought a message from Darling. And the Burglar-man's here—he's got a dog for you . . . a *beauty!*—have you seen him?"

CHAPTER XI

BUT the afternoon was to prove one of further surprises.

For no sooner had the party on the lawn recovered from the advent of the dog and settled down peacefully to tea than a sound of approaching wheels warned April of another visitor.

"I wonder who it can be?" she addressed Miss Van Someren. "I hope it's not Mrs. Moneypenny!" She smiled at the American girl. "Do you know the vicar's wife?"

"No, though I've just met the Vicar. But I've seen the lady in church in her cunning little hat—or is it a bonnet, do you think? Brother and I have names for everyone and we call her 'Mrs. Noah'! She only wants a wooden stand to be just perfect."

"Have you a name for me?" April enquired mischievously.

Miss Van Someren crossed her neat little feet where she sat in the basket chair and gave a quick glance at her brother for directions.

Van Someren frowned and April laughed aloud.

"Very well," she said, "we will leave it a mystery. But I *hope* . . ." she paused to extinguish the lamp under the silver kettle. "I hope it's not 'Mrs. Japhet.'"

"It's a verry nice name," said Miss Van Someren hastily, "but perhaps you'd think . . . you see"—she tried to explain the position—"it was when we didn't know you."

"Why that makes it worse!" said Lorry desperately.

"And now I *must* hear it," April laughed back—"do tell me: I promise to be forgiving."

"It's . . ." the American girl coloured, bright eyes raised with a gleam of mischief under their long lashes.

"We called you 'the Peach,'" she said, "Brother and I."

"How delightful!" April was much amused. "I feel highly flattered. But I wish you hadn't said it was 'before you came to know me.'"

She looked up, as quick steps sounded through the house and there appeared Majendie, unannounced, evidently a little taken aback to find April thus surrounded.

"I wasn't asked to the party, but I've come!" he explained. His smile broadened as he recognised the pretty American.

"Why, Boris!" April rose from her chair. "Wherever have you sprung from?"

He stepped through the open window and stood for a moment holding her outstretched hand, drinking in eagerly the welcome on her face.

"Like the Frenchman's little star I 'shot and shot . . .' And presently I shall 'disappear.' Don't be alarmed. The simple truth is this. I only received your letter to-day and when I heard of the burglary

I felt I must run down and see that all was well.
Please forgive me?"

"But I'm delighted. Where's your luggage, boy?"

He hesitated for a moment, looking down at her.
Then:

"At the 'Admiral Rodney,'" he confessed. "I didn't mean to stay, really. But I thought of that dreadful slow train back that stops every now and then to take a nap; it's like a jibbing horse—or rather a jibbing nightmare! So I threw a tooth-brush and a copy of the New Witness into the nearest bag and blessed the memory of the hen-pecked Tom Judkins."

"What nonsense!" April's voice was indignant.

Van Someren from his chair on the lawn narrowed his grey eyes, watching the pair before him, trying to place the new-comer in the altered scheme of things.

"There goes your cab!" as a sound of wheels scrunching the gravel reached them, "run after it, quick, and tell the driver to bring your bag here."

"It's awfully good of you!" Majendie was off, cutting across the grass in the direction of the gate, the 'Bosun'—who had greeted him with effusion—tearing after on his short brown legs.

"It's Boris Majendie," the hostess turned to her other guests, "my—cousin." She brought the word out with an effort. "He's come down from town—a little late perhaps!—to catch the burglars."

"He'd catch anything at that rate, I should say." Van Someren smiled, curiously relieved, as he watched the tall figure swing easily out of sight.

At his sister's silent signal, he rose to his feet. "I think we'd better be moving," he suggested unwillingly.

"Oh, please don't go yet. Why, you've only just come! And I want to show your sister over the house. There's a quaint old 'powder-closet' leading out of my room that I'm sure she'd like to see—a relic of those days when one's hair was dressed in a pyramid to last the whole week! I'm glad it's no longer the fashion."

Her visitors settled down again with a little sigh of relief. The girl was enjoying herself, set at ease by April's simple charm.

"I'd sure love to! It's a vurry old house, I suppose? But then . . ."

She broke off as Boris reappeared through the drawing-room window and was introduced to the pair.

"Everything's old in England," she continued, "why, even our cottage here is a real antique. Yesterday," she turned to that interested youth, who had drawn up a chair between her and his hostess and was obediently drinking tea, "I made a great discovery. On our bath-room window-pane," her voice held a note of awe, "someone has scratched with a diamond ring 'Jane Jones, 1720.' Now isn't that wonderful?"

"The limit," said Majendie solemnly. "But why on the bath-room window? Perhaps it was the first bath that Jane Jones ever took? Or it might have been her last? The shock doubtless killed her."

He gave a deep sigh, fastidiously picking a piece of angelica off his cake.

Miss Van Someren glanced at him doubtfully and caught a tell-tale quiver near the wide humorous mouth.

"It's a luxury, I opine, a bath-room—in *this* country?"

Their eyes met for a moment and they both laughed.

"Hit!" said Majendie meekly. "But still we're getting cleaner, inch by inch, layer by layer. Why, in the latest Workmen's Buildings there's a bath-room to every flat." He reached across for another cup of tea. "Jolly convenient too—they generally use it for coal."

"We've got a coal-truck," the Bosun chipped in. "Skipper made it himself—to bring the coal to the kitchen, you know, from the cellar in the yard—and sometimes I ride in it." He giggled suddenly and, sidling up to the girl, slipped a little hand into hers.

"Would you like to hear," he began insinuatingly—"of the first ride in it that I ever gave a kid?"

"Yes—do tell me." She lifted the little fellow up on to her lap, where he sat very stiff and upright but evidently pleased.

They made a pretty picture—so Majendie thought—the dark gipsy face close to the fair smiling one, with its halo of fluffy hair, that held a deeper tone than Van Someren's smooth head.

"We—ll?" she encouraged him in her sweet drawling voice.

The Bosun rearranged his lanyard, exhibiting with pride a large clasp-knife.

"It's got four blades," he said in a hurried aside to Majendie, "and a corkscrew and a little thing for stones in horses' hoofs. Well—Darling had a party—tennis, you know, and someone brought a kid—a girl"—he gave a little expressive snort—"all dressed up, with pink ribbons and white shoes and *beads*." His disgusted face delighted his audience. "Well, I kept clear, fielding for tennis balls; and then someone said: 'My little girl would like to play with your little boy . . .' and I knew I was in for it." His voice took a tragic note. "Darling told me to take her to see my rabbits, and we were just crossing the yard—it's rather muddy, you know, and she kept on babbling about her 'pitty shoes'—when I saw the coal-truck . . ."

"And you put her in it and took her for a ride?" Majendie roared with delight—"pink ribbon and beads and all?"

"Rather," said the Bosun with an appreciative grin. "She had four goes up and down the yard. It wouldn't have mattered so much on a *dry day*"—he added thoughtfully—"or if Jim hadn't left such a lot of coal-dust in it."

"Wasn't there a row?"

"You bet," said the un-repentant sinner. "Skipper gave me a licking." He felt the American girl's arm draw him a shade closer.

"Didn't it hurt any?" she asked.

"Lor', no!" said the 'Bosun' carelessly. "I'm pretty

tough. But oh! she was a sight—a perfect pie-bald at the end—I've always loved that coal-truck ever since. I say," his thoughts flew off at a tangent—"have you asked your brother about that gun?" He wriggled round to look in his fair friend's face.

"He's the man that shot the burglar, you know," he explained to Majendie.

"Not yet, but I'll be sure not to forget," said Miss Van Someren. "Will you come down and have tea with us one day?"

"May I?" he slid off her knee with a longing glance at his hero.

"To-morrow?" he suggested with a little skip of joy.

The next moment he was off and away after a butterfly that had sailed across his path.

"That's one thing about England I just find perfect"—Miss Van Someren watched the graceful little figure in its headlong course—"the children, you know. They seem younger than ours and perhaps . . . not quite so spoilt."

"Well—we don't give them gold nurseries and dolls with diamond eyes."

"Oh—but that's the usual exaggerated way you English look at us. You just pick out one phase of life—the millionaire phase—and think it applies to the whole of New York City!"

They settled down to the inevitable controversy on Anglo-American differences.

Meanwhile at the other side of the tea-table Van Someren was talking to his hostess.

"He's a good guard—so they tell me," he referred to the big dog. "They wanted to find him a home and I thought perhaps—if you cared for him—he might be of use here."

"How kind of you to remember me—" she appreciated the delicate way he made his little offering. "I needed a dog badly. I am so pleased to have him. By the way, has he a name?"

"Not that I know of. We must find him one—if you think he deserves it, after hunting your cat."

"We'll ask Mr. Majendie," April suggested, smiling. "He's sure to think of something classical and appropriate!"

She turned to Boris, who had been listening to a recital of the Vicar's accident.

"First a parson and then a cat," she heard him say—"evidently a dog of Catholic tastes. I should like to see this sportsman."

"So you shall," said April, "when you've quite finished tea. We want a name for him—what do you suggest?"

"Describe him—carefully." Majendie closed his eyes.

"We—ll—" began Miss Van Someren at her hostess' little nod. "He's big . . . and hairy . . . and prone to get into any sort of muss . . ."

"Esau!" Majendie slapped his leg—"that's it!—the very thing. D'you think a 'muss' of pottage is his form? And we all know he's a 'mighty Hunter before the Lord'—Master—Esau—Panhasard." His

eyes surveyed April mischievously as the other guests laughed.

To his surprise she frowned.

"You don't like it?" he persisted wilfully. "Then he shall be called 'Bob'—like every other sheep-dog in an orthodox establishment. And now I want to see him? Will you be my guide, Miss Van Someren?" He stood up, looking down at her whimsically, one eyebrow raised, a tiny flicker of temper in the dark brown pupils.

But April checked him again.

"I'm afraid you'll have to wait, Boris, or go by yourself. I want first to show Miss Van Someren over the house."

She turned to her pretty guest.

"You would like to see it, wouldn't you?"

"Surely." The girl smiled back. But it seemed to Majendie in the nature of a snub. For the first time it dawned on him that April treated him like a child: that unforgivable sin to the man who is still conscious of his youth!

Van Someren, aware of slight friction in the air, suggested himself as a substitute and the two men moved off together towards the distant stables.

For a moment April watched them, her mind working in unconscious comparison. Boris, slight and supple with the easy carriage that was a part of him, inherited as casually as the old name he bore. Van Someren with a lesser grace, yet in every firm step suggesting a hint of power; broad-shouldered, capable, equally independent.

They talked a little stiffly as they went, as though each realised a subtle antagonism that was based on a deeper sentiment than racial prejudice. The American would have willingly unthawed but the Englishman's cool manner roused in him a note of irritation, a suspicion of condescension that galled his pride.

At the gate leading into the yard Majendie paused and lowered his voice, conscious of the presence of the groom.

"I want to thank you," he said, "for your kindness to my cousin. It was lucky for her she had such a capable neighbour."

Van Someren nodded his head.

"It wasn't a pleasant adventure for a lady all alone. I was very glad to be of any service."

Majendie looked at him: at the square jaw and finely-proportioned head, and caught an equally appraising glance from the keen grey eyes.

"That's why I brought her this dog," the other continued. "I don't think it's safe in this lonesome house without some form of guard."

"Very good of you," the Englishman answered with a slightly amused smile—"but I don't really think there's any need for alarm. I should say a burglary happens here about once in a century."

He whistled to attract the groom's attention.

"Bring that dog out, will you? I want to have a look at him."

"Yessir," the man touched his forelock and disappeared, and presently, with a leap and a bark of joy,

the great shaggy creature came rollicking towards them.

Boris opened the gate and went quickly through.
“Good old fellow—good man! You’re a beauty,
aren’t you?”

The dog jumped about him joyfully, scenting a would-be friend—glad to be set free from the dark coach-house.

“Steady now, steady.” He took the rough head firmly in his hands and, opening the dog’s mouth, looked inside at the formidable teeth.

“He’s quite young still, I see. Well-bred, too!
Where did you pick him up?”

He turned to Van Someren, leaning on the gate, watching the scene a little wistfully. City-bred, he held no country lore, and although he loved animals he did not understand them.

“I was told he was all right”—he evaded the question—“hardly a lady’s pet perhaps, but good enough for the purpose.”

“Rather. Why, he wants a drink!”—as the dog went nosing round a bucket that stood half-empty in the yard.

“Poor old chap! Haven’t they thought of it?—on a day like this, too!” His voice was plainly indignant. He caught up the bucket and emptying it by the pump, poured out a vigorous libation for his friend, tilting it down so that the dog could easily reach the water.

“We’ll go round to the kitchen now and get him something to eat.”

It seemed to Van Someren as though the animal had curiously changed hands; that Majendie's air of ownership extended to the whole establishment. An uncomfortable suspicion began to stir within him. Was he more than a cousin, this finely-built young man? Again his mind drifted back to that memorable meeting. Did the secret of that second ring lie in Majendie's hands?

They reached the kitchen in silence, the dog trotting between them.

"Good-day, Mary!" Majendie, unabashed, stuck his head in at the window. "What a nice savoury smell!"

He sniffed it up delightedly as the buxom cook turned round from her place by the fire.

"Lor', Mr. Majendie, you did make me start! How are you, sir—glad to see you, sir!"

She wiped her hand on her apron and held it out obedient to his gesture. For the two were great friends and Majendie had a way with servants that made him instantly popular.

Van Someren looked on with hardly-concealed surprise. Here was this orthodox Englishman, stiff-backed and aloof, shaking hands cheerfully with the cook.

"This is Mr. Van Someren, Mary."

The American followed the other's lead, with a shade of hesitation, that did not escape the woman.

She dropped him a country curtsey with a prim "Good-day, sir," and turned away at once to execute Majendie's wishes regarding the dog.

Van Someren's rejected hand went nervously into his pocket. He felt oddly rebuffed in this land where he found himself continually at fault. He could not understand that what was natural with Majendie might appear in the mind of the country-woman as "a liberty" with him. His democracy blinded him to the finer lines of a country in which for countless generations service has held high honour: the pride of the lowly-born in knowing and keeping 'their place' side by side with their superiors by birth.

"Lorry, Lorry . . . ! Is that you?" A voice cried above him, and his sister's face appeared as she leaned through the window.

"I want you to come right here and see this perfect view. Mrs. Panhasard says you may, and it's up the stairs and the first door to the left."

"Off you go," said Majendie good-naturedly, "I'll look after Esau," and Van Someren, somewhat glad to escape, obeyed the girl's directions.

"That's the gentleman as shot the thief, isn't it, Sir? But I expect the Missus 'as told you everythink. Him and his sister live up t'riverside. From furrin parts they be, America, I'm told."

Mary sniffed, consciously superior.

"Well," Majendie smiled, "he proved pretty useful the other night, wherever he hails from."

He took the plate of scraps from the cook, and put it before the dog, still inwardly amused as he remembered his parting injunction to April to "get to know her neighbours."

"Yessir, and a bad business it were for Jim Saun-

ders—not that 'e didn't desarve it, but 'e'll go short fer life. 'Scuse me a minute, sir——" she bustled off and, opening the oven door, peered anxiously within.

"'Tis a h'apple-pastry, sir, and they do catch that quick! But as I was a-saying, sir, to me cousin Tom to-day—'im as has took 'is place in the stables now—it were *bound* to 'appen, sir. We 'ad the warning, we did, three times over. A corpse in the candle, sir, the night afore, and *one* magpie as I went to pick some parsley in the garden . . ." her voice grew gradually more dramatic to Majendie's inward joy—"an' when I looked in me tea-cup, sir, that evening after tea, there it were, as plain as a pike-staff: a Stranger to the 'ouse—and trouble and tears . . ."

"Well—it's a good thing it's over," said her listener cheerfully.

But she looked up into his face with eyes that seemed far away and he noticed for the first time the curious intent stare of those that have that mysterious sense that is known as second-sight.

"Eh, but is it, sir?" was all she said.

And despite his healthy young scepticism Majendie felt a curious shrinking at the words: the infection of superstition old as the world itself.

CHAPTER XII

"I WISH," said Majendie sadly, "you'd move a little to the left. Your hair is taking all the colour out of that copper beech."

But April refused to stir from her comfortable position, propped against the trunk of the fine old tree. Her hat lay beside her, and a warm ray of sunlight piercing the narrow glade played with red gleams about her head and started off to the pale bracken beyond the woodland path, that was strewn with last year's beech nuts and the feathery brown dust of multitudinous leaves.

At a little distance the slight figure of a girl bending over an easel, utterly absorbed in her sketch of the far-off mill, broke the monotony of green and beside Majendie on a gipsy fire of dried twigs a kettle was singing fitfully, screened from the wind by an open red sunshade and a small picnic hamper.

Boris lay stretched out on the soft ground, one hand comfortably supporting his head. He had long since resolutely refused to 'watch the pot.'

"The only chance of its boiling is to pretend it's not there. And I want to talk about myself—it's so rarely I get the chance."

"I'm too sleepy to listen," April protested lazily, "but if it's any relief to you, talk on, my dear child."

"Well," said Majendie, nothing abashed, "I'm very much interested at present in myself. I'm thinking of a new departure in life. Merely matrimony."

"What?" April sat up, wide awake now.

The man laughed softly at her incredulous expression.

"I was afraid it might be a shock. I ought perhaps to have broken it more gently—like the tactful fisherman: 'We've brought the corpse 'ome, missus—yer 'usband as *was*.' You can't beat that for simple suggestiveness! Well, to proceed. The facts are these: My own profession, gentlemanly and over-crowded, barely pays for my cigarettes. Journalism about covers my washing. The charity of that somewhat careless couple who brought me into the world allows me a meat meal most days. And the rest is covered by what are pleasantly known as 'standing accounts.' Now, that's all serene so long as they remain so; but lately they've begun to run—in hot pursuit, you understand. You can see them almost any day tearing all over the Temple and down Fleet Street after me. The worry of it is ruining my complexion."

He passed a hand lovingly over his smooth face.

"Now what is a man to do?" He raised his left eyebrow whimsically. "I can't cheat at chemin-de-fer or run a bogus company, or accept commission for the sale of a friend's bad wine. I'm incapable of anything gentlemanly and inoffensive to keep afloat on the so-called social tide. I haven't even the knack of being pleasant to people I thoroughly despise on the chance of crumbs—or fizz—that fall from the rich

man's table. But I *can* make love . . . beautifully."

He paused to enjoy April's amused disgust.

"Now there's a certain lady, possessor of what was known in the good old days as a 'ripe charm.' A little over-ripe perhaps, but we can't afford to cavil. And of late she has shown a singular predilection for my society. She's not young, but not quite old, and her purse simply bulges. It's as much as I can do to carry it from her brougham to the Ritz! So, why shouldn't I do it? why . . . why . . . why?"

He sang the phrase lustily in a deep musical voice and a startled bunny leisurely crossing the path threw up its heels and bolted into the bracken.

April's eyes followed it for a moment and then came back to Majendie.

"If I thought you were really serious I could give you a thousand reasons."

He rolled over on his chest, his elbows dug into the mossy ground, his chin propped on his hands, staring up at her.

"I *am* serious," he said in a different voice. "Albeit I strive to cloak my emotion under a ribald manner."

April frowned.

"Then you might as well come and ask me to approve of your committing suicide."

"Phew . . .!" Boris whistled. "That's rather strong, isn't it?"

A silence fell between them, broken by the stirring of the leaves and the occasional note of a bird hidden in the branches.

"Well?" Majendie watched her, "I'm waiting for your reasons."

"Supposing," April hesitated—"supposing you married this lady for the sake of her money—which in itself is a horrible idea . . ."

"One minute," he interrupted her, "I don't agree with you there. It's a bargain, pure and simple, a commercial undertaking. She provides me with a luxurious home and I give her in return," he smiled mischievously, "my youth, beauty and brains and the chance of sharing my coming fame."

"I thought you said you were serious?" But she could not restrain a laugh.

"So I am. Do go on." His voice was penitent.

"Well—we will set aside the mutual advantages. But you can't obliterate the main drawback—the total lack of love. Supposing, after marriage, you met someone you really learned to care for?"

"You seem to take it for granted that I'm utterly heart-whole now."

He looked at her a shade wistfully, drinking in the picture she made against the dark background of the tree.

"Oh, I think you've had your flirtations, plenty of them, too! Why, I know of a dozen during the last few years. Your heart is like an *hôtel*!" She laughed back at him.

"But it may have its Royal Suite—its Holy of Holies—reserved to the end of time for the presence of its Queen."

His voice sank and into his face came a look of

tenderness, betraying a deeper mood, a hint of pain that awoke in her a faint answering fear.

It was not possible . . . ? she said to herself, and thrust the thought aside, but not before the quick wonder of it was mirrored in her eyes.

"And since," he went on slowly—"one cannot live in a dream: since a man's ideal may be far and away above him, the next best thing is to make the best of what is within his grasp." He gave a short laugh that seemed directed against himself. "Secure 'ripe charm' and bulging purse against the inevitable day—the day of reckoning.

‘For love and debt
And disappointment have me in a net.’”

He quoted the words lightly.

"And that reminds me . . ." He hunted in his pocket and produced a little book, turning the pages over quickly in search of a favourite passage. "I know you're fond of verse—just listen to this :

‘And heaven's dimmest rafter
Shall tumble to our laughter,
While we leave our tears to your hopeless years
Though there be nothing after;
And while your day encloses
Its torn and tattered roses,
We shall pluck the stars from your prison bars
And bind celestial posies.

An hour to heap our treasure,
And tread our careless measure,

An hour of dreams where the rainbow gleams,
 And the moonlight takes its pleasure.
 An hour to find what bliss is
 In freer worlds than this is;
 An hour to lie 'twixt earth and sky,
 And conquer time with kisses.'"

He read well, his face alight with the beauty of the words.

And again as April watched him she saw clearly the dual nature of the man: the sensitive soul of the idealist at war with the material side—his strong sensuality and love of ease.

All her woman's heart went out to help him in the battle, pity awakening a love that was curiously impersonal; in which she held no active part, but seemed to stand aside sheltering this fellow-soul from the selfsame disillusion that she had, bitterly, survived.

"Well?"—he looked up, his eyes straining for her approval—"it's Richard Middleton, you know, the man I told you about the last time I was here. I've always meant to give you this—if you care to have it."

He tossed the book into her lap and drew a shade closer.

"It's beautiful." She nodded her head gravely, "and quite dear of you to give it me."

She held out a hand in gratitude.

He took it in his own and bending his head pressed his hot lips against it.

"I would like to give you . . . the whole world!" he said huskily, "to pluck the stars from your prison

bars' . . ." His voice trailed away into a silence that seemed strangely articulate. Still holding her hand, he moved the cool fingers up to his brow. She could feel the pulses beating in it, the soft unwrinkled skin of youth, the thick young hair that crowned it.

It seemed to her, still in that curious impersonal mood, that he lay at her feet like a woodland sacrifice, offered up by Pan in mockery—the beautiful young strength of him, the ardent soul—to the one woman living who dared not dream of love.

That it was more than a dream, that the man was wholly serious, she could not realise. Yet the sweetness of it like a south wind blowing across the desert of her life held her for a spell unconsciously.

Then, with a quick-drawn breath, she took her hand away. Cruelly-kind she brought him back to the hard material world.

"And what about tea?" she said in a steady voice.

He raised his head sharply as though she had dealt him a blow and, meeting her kind, grave eyes, flushed to the roots of his hair.

"Ah well!" He stretched his arms above him with a well-acted yawn. "I believe I was half-asleep. What's that confounded kettle up to?"

He turned on it ruthlessly, hiding his resentment.

"The unexpected, as usual, has occurred—it's actually boiling," he announced. "And now for the Vicar's daughter! Do you think the grossly material claim of food is likely to appeal?"

"Monica . . . Tea!" April called.

The girl turned her head with a start.

"Oh, *please*—one minute," she cried back and bent to her task again.

"There! I told you so," said Boris reproachfully. "She has a soul above mere bread-and-butter."

"Unlike myself," said April with a smile.

"The Queen can do no wrong." The boy's voice mocked. "Though I sometimes wish that Her Majesty were a shade less 'praktisch.' Do you like bread-and-butter thin or thick?"

He seized the loaf and a knife and, as she rose to her feet offering to assist, waved her imperiously away.

"No, no. Leave it to your slave. Besides I must get seasoned to domesticity."

He gave her a quick, malicious glance, as the third member of the little party joined them, forbidding further discussion on the subject.

"Well, is the picture finished?" April asked.

"I *think* so," the girl answered shyly. "I'm so afraid of spoiling it if I touch it up any more."

Majendie looked up with a flash of sympathy. "Best leave it alone," he agreed, "it doesn't do to overdo even a good thing."

"Charm should be never *over* ripe," April suggested sotto voce.

"By the way"—an oblique train of thought carried her back to the American girl's pseudonym for herself—"do you know the Van Somerens, Monica?"

"No, but I think Mamma is going there this afternoon, on her way back from a call with Matilda at the Gervases'."

"Not Sir Hugo Gervase?" April asked quickly. She caught Majendie's warning frown and bit her lip.

"Yes—do you know them? They've taken Sleyd Hall for the shooting this season."

"I've met them," April confessed, "a long time ago—quite casually—they wouldn't remember me."

She bent over the tea-things, her face, with its tell-tale note of panic, hidden from her guest. "Is it far from here, Sleyd Hall?" At any cost she must know.

"About nine miles, I think. It's on the Swatham Road; a beautiful old place, but, like so many others, the owners can't afford to keep it up. They let it every year and live in the Dower House. There's good shooting, you see, and it's close to two packs. Still it seems very hard they can't live in it themselves."

"Very," April agreed. She dared not look at Boris, who was watching her nervously.

That her Godfather—of all men!—should elect to settle in the district was a formidable flaw in her scheme of independence.

What would happen if she met him? She shivered at the thought, aware, not for the first time, of the tangled web about her.

It had seemed so easy to hide away, secure under an alias, in this buried country-place with the full intention of living a hermit-life.

But circumstances beyond her control had forced friends upon her and she was beginning to learn the fact that there is no form of curiosity so determined and suspicious as that bred in a village far removed

from town. More than once she had found it difficult to evade all allusion to the past in her conversations with Mrs. Newcomen, who, too well-bred to press the point, wondered a little at times at her neighbour's reticence.

Mrs. Moneypenny could be soothed with a cheque in the interest of the parish poor or the building of the Porch.

The Van Somerens took her on trust—she held no fear of them. But Sir Hugo Gervase . . . ?—Here was a death-blow to all her tranquil hopes.

Now as she sat there sipping her tea, watching the little artist slowly lose her shyness under Majendie's chatter, she felt as though her holiday were drawing to a close: that she trembled upon the brink of an unpleasant revelation that might carry her even to the verge of disrepute.

She held no fond illusion on the charity of the world. Her motives for the hermit-life would be surely disbelieved.

For she stood in that curious position that as yet has no social grade—open to every suspicion from bad and good alike.

It is a striking fact that in an enlightened age and legally in the right a woman rarely passes through the narrow gate of divorce without a trace of dishonour clinging to her name. Although she may be admitted as pure as Cæsar's wife, the fact of her husband's sin involves her subtly in the eyes of her sex.

April Panhasard had lived a life of secret martyrdom, had endured ignominy of body and of soul; but

when at length at the end of her strength she had sought a legal remedy it was to find herself exposed to the censure of the majority.

It seemed to bring to her standard the riff-raff of society, a curious déclassé set she had never deigned to know; whereas old friends shrank back and new ones smiled or sneered, and she felt herself a failure, social and domestic.

Brave as she was the bitterness of it slowly sapped her courage. She had reigned so long by right of birth and her husband's high position that this inward knowledge of being thrust without the camp, through no personal fault, after years of bearing a burden intolerable and prolonged, seemed a crowning injustice in a country labelled "free."

For until Divorce is recognised for the Sexes on equal terms, in the sight of both Law and Society, as a clean and fitting end to matrimonial wrongs it will always be the weaker sex who suffer the injustice—the woman who goes under in her struggle with the man.

At present in this country Divorce is little more than a public punishment for the sinner in the case: an advertisement of adultery base and undignified, providing a spectacle as barbarous and degrading as ever filled a Roman Amphitheatre in gladiatorial days.

Many a man and woman taking this into account continue to drag on an existence that is in essence un-moral and holds no possible outlook, sooner than face the degradation of the Law as it stands.

For Separation—that specious compromise between

liberty and public opinion—entails not only a sacrifice, financial and otherwise, but robs its victims of personal freedom and hope of future happiness.

And now as April's thoughts turned to Sir Hugo Gervase she wondered how she would stand in her Godfather's worldly eyes? If the kind old face would grow stern with further misunderstandings, if again she would be treated as the woman who had failed? At times like these she was seized with mistrust of her own reasoning. Would it have been possible still to fight on? Could she have endured it up to the gates of death—mentally and physically equal to the strain?

She had laid her hand to the plough, and herself turned back . . .

"Mrs. Panhasard." She started as from a dream. "You look *so* tired—don't you think we ought to be getting home?"

Monica's gentle voice, the timid affection of the childish face seemed like a breath of warm love across her misery.

"I'm afraid . . . I'm very stupid to-day," she roused herself resolutely, conscious of her guests. "I think the heat makes me drowsy." She offered her little apology, smiling back into the dark eyes. "But there's no need to hurry—it can't be getting late." She noticed suddenly that the two had packed the tea-hamper and guessed that Majendie had divined her desire to be left undisturbed.

"How nice and tidy! That's very good of you—and now may I come and see your sketch?"

"If you care to," the girl colored with pleasure.

"It's very slight, you know, and . . . and amateurish."

"Me, too," said Majendie promptly. He slipped a hand through April's arm, helping her to her feet, his back turned to Monica, who could not see his face.

Looking up in it with sad eyes in which he read her thoughts, April caught such a look of pity, of pain and understanding that her own filled with sudden tears that were born of gratitude.

"You *dear* boy"—she said under her breath and then inconsequently, "what a foolish woman I am!"

The girl had slipped away to place the cherished picture in the most-approved light and the two were left alone, facing each other, surrounded by the trees.

"Foolish? God knows you aren't that."

His voice was grave, his face so full of steady loyalty, the admiration he felt and the sorrow he divined, that a little sob escaped her, wrung from her full heart.

Impulsively, hardly thinking what she did, she took his head in her hands and drawing it down kissed him gently on the cheek.

Not for a moment did Majendie misjudge it, though the swift physical shock sent his heart galloping. With a supreme effort he held himself in check.

"Thank you," he said unsteadily, "I'll never forget that."

CHAPTER XIII

CAPTAIN NEWCOMEN did not approve of his wife's new friend.

To Candida herself the slight cloud of mystery that shadowed April Panhasard detracted no whit from the charm of her society. To her somewhat unconventional spirit the fact that the widow—as she was considered to be by all at Coddell-in-the-Dale—offered none of the threadbare methods of introduction, but pursued an even course heedless of people's hints, placed her instantly in a broader world than that peopled by Mrs. Moneypenny and her kind.

April's perfect self-possession and the subtle atmosphere about her—that sense of gentle birth that is as undefinable as it is unmistakable—allowed no loophole for doubt as to her origin. Her reticence was so clearly akin to pride that Candida's imagination fostered the idea of a secret sorrow rather than any need for concealment in the lady's evident desire for seclusion.

But John Newcomen's charity was narrower in its limits. He mistrusted what he could not understand. Orthodoxy social and religious was the basis on which he built his views. He looked askance at the friendship that grew beneath his eyes and yet could find no adequate reason to forbid it. He did not realise that

to his wife this association with a cultured woman of the world was like a breath of sea-air in the hedged-in valley of narrow country ways.

Intellectual and imaginative, Candida found little in common with the sport-loving, easy-going bucolic temperament. She had grown accustomed to a self-absorbed existence; loving her child passionately, her garden and her motor. But beyond these material distractions she craved for the interchange of ideas with a class to whom literature and art were more than casual subjects to be glanced at in the papers. Unconsciously she missed that environment of thought which, alien as she had been to her former husband's temperament, had nevertheless educated her in her life with Geoffrey Clifton.

For the wall of estrangement slowly upreared between the sailor and herself had proved a subtle barrier to mental intercourse. The old days of happy argument were over. To disagree in a life à deux leads to ultimate reunion; and that pleasant form it takes, known colloquially as "making it up," held dangers they each in secret feared.

For a long time, it is true, Newcomen had striven to convince his wife, on his own religious grounds, that what she lacked in life was a definite belief.

But his very severity had undermined good intention, rousing in Candida a spirit of opposition based on her painful theory that her husband regarded her as a woman fundamentally "weak."

She attributed their inward want of accord to a lack of respect that in reality did not exist. Had he

but stooped to pet her, to be more than uniformly "kind," her sunny nature would have responded with an ardour of gratitude.

Her steadily growing conviction that Newcomen had married her from chivalry and pity, without a deeper passion, roused her sensitive pride and hid from her the truth: that she herself had fallen in love with the man.

So that when the news reached her of his appointment in home waters and she realised that this would mean periodical visits, she was torn asunder between the two poles of feeling—the unconscious longing for his proximity and the knowledge of the strain it would entail.

No more would a spell of solitude leave her to her dreams. Meetings and partings, explanations and evasions would multiply and bring with them their secret hopes and fears.

The Bosun hailed the announcement with unmitigated joy. Despite his step-father's severity the boy worshipped him, seeing with the clear eyes of childhood the efforts of a man towards a simple justice unbiassed by the affections.

In his little heart he resented the knowledge of the slight tie between them. His own parent—as he firmly believed Geoffrey Clifton to have been—had died before his birth and, although his mother had married again almost immediately, the "Skipper" was not his property, his own "real father," and herein lay a grievance which he nursed secretly.

It is doubtful whether Newcomen ever realised the

place he held in the heart of Derrick Kilmarny's son: the pitiful desire of the child to earn his step-father's approval.

Candida, with her mother's instinct, guessed the tragedy, seeing in Newcomen's cool attitude another of those circles that widened out from the first stone thrown: the sin that still lived on with its endless chain of consequences.

"Was it never to end?" she asked herself in despair, the same sad question that April Panhasard voiced.

Unconsciously between the two women, sympathy sprang up, bred from a common bond of failure, a grudge each bore to life.

Constantly the motor would wind round the lanes that led to the old house buried in the woods. Candida drove herself, the Bosun tucked beside her, eager to jump out when it stopped in front of the stone porch and call in his shrill boy's voice for his dearest "Mrs. Pan."

Rarely could she resist the appeal of the kindly pair, but on one point only was she firm. Whenever the Swatham road was mooted as destination, no coaxing speech of the child, nor pleasant pressure upon his Mother's part could lure her forth from duties indoors.

For she dreaded the chance of meeting with her God-father at Sleyd.

To-day, as the car stood waiting, the Bosun's face wore a dejected look. The Skipper was at Portsmouth, returned to active work, and the two women

had planned a day's shopping in town. He would be left alone with Susan, the old nurse, who still lived on with the mistress she had served so long.

As April came down the steps, Candida was struck afresh with her grace and dignity. She looked tall to-day in her dark coat and skirt, a touch of mystery added by the wide-brimmed hat with its black lace veil that completely shrouded her face.

"You *are* covered up!" Mrs. Newcomen laughed, conscious of her own light frock and sunburnt skin; the golden hair rioting under a round toque that matched her blue eyes. "You really look like London —whereas I"—she shrugged her shoulders gaily—"am the true country mouse!"

"You forget I am to chaperone you," April replied as she stepped up into the motor. Through the thick veil she could feel the other's eyes upon her and went on evasively:

"I always get untidy, travelling—and, with the heavy responsibility that I've already mentioned, I 'considered it my duty' to be garbed in 'decent black.' "

They both laughed at her parody of Mrs. Money-penny's manner.

"'My duty to the parish,'" Candida corrected. "Poor dear lady! what a perfect type she is of middle-class virtue strongly streaked with spite!"

She turned the corner neatly and whirled towards the station, pausing at her house to pick up the chauffeur with a strict injunction to the latter to be sure and drive back. For a story had reached Newcomen's ear that, during their absence one day, the Bosun had

been seen gaily steering the car at full speed through the somewhat perturbed village.

They reached London in time for lunch and went to Candida's club, a quiet, country affair close to Victoria Station, deserted in August and looking somewhat forlorn; from thence to the Stores and up to the west end shops to turn finally their tired footsteps in search of tea.

The empty streets had a strange unfamiliar look, with here and there a chattering group of Americans, the guttural "Ja wohl!" of a German or the neat figure of a French-woman. The shops themselves were changed, teeming with "Bargains" marked in dollars and notices hung up "Ici on parle français," etc., to lure the foreign visitors. London was in the throes of the dying Summer Sales—an unpleasant place, dust-driven and shabby.

"Here's a tea-shop!—won't this do?"

Candida paused before a narrow entrance, where the carefully curtained windows allowed a narrow vista full of Japanese suggestion.

"Excellently, I should think," April led the way—"although I've never been here before—— Why! it's quite pretty, isn't it?"

For they emerged from the passage into a pleasantly-furnished room, cool and scented with the faint fragrance of tea, bright with little tables and clean white cloths and Oriental porcelain of fine and transparent make.

"Now what will you have?" April was playing hostess. "Tea or coffee—there's iced coffee perhaps?"

They settled themselves down in a comfortable corner, glad to escape the dust and heat outside.

The place seemed devoid of life as if the owner hardly hoped for customers in August; but as Mrs. Panhasard turned to the glass behind her to raise her veil, she saw the reflection of a further room beyond, screened by heavy curtains, half hidden in obscurity.

For a moment, thoughtlessly, she watched the two people who formed its only occupants.

Then, slightly amused, turned to her companion.

"A pretty waitress absorbed in a flirtation." So she explained her smile to Candida. "I hardly like to disturb her, but still we want our tea."

Candida laughed and followed her friend's gaze through the draped doorway.

A tall man stood there, his back turned towards them, one hand on the arm of a girl in a lavender print dress, with a frilled muslin apron tied with a cherry riband.

She was looking up at him with mischief in her eyes, full red lips parted, showing her even teeth. The man behind the curtain was talking in a low persuasive voice; the steady murmur reached them without a sense of words. A lock of the girl's fair hair that was elaborately arranged, brushed high above her forehead and brought down in little curls over her ears, had slipped from its position and lay across her cheek.

Neatly, with steady fingers, the man smoothed it back, fastening it in place as he still talked on. It

was the natural action of the lover or the husband, received with the same nonchalance—a touch of familiarity that needed no apology.

But just at that moment a woman bustled into the room.

"Chloe . . . Chloe!" she called—"where are you?" and the fair girl came forward into the shop, suddenly conscious of the presence of customers.

"Tea or coffee, please?" She fingered the tablet that hung from the riband at her waist, as the pair at the table eyed her curiously.

She had a face, pretty and round, that was at once child-like and insolent—a contradiction often to be seen in large cities. She gazed boldly at them with bright aggressive eyes, swaying a little on her feet, with a conscious pose of the head, a sure knowledge of herself, oddly at variance with her smooth skin and soft childish mouth.

She was at once Innocence and Guile; Eve after the apple, still a little frightened, assuming airs—that doubtless tickled the serpent!—of mature experience.

"Tea for both of us and sandwiches and . . . do you like cake?" April asked her guest.

The girl, awaiting Mrs. Newcomen's reply, gave a quick backward glance into the room beyond, and, as Candida hesitated, the other actor in the little comedy appeared.

He walked down the further side of the shop, looking neither to right nor left, nodded to the book-keeper, now seated at her desk beside the door and, apparently ignoring the girl in lavender, settled his

hat more firmly on his head and passed out into the street.

Despite herself April gave a little start of surprise. There was no possible mistake. The man was Boris Majendie!

After the first moment of amazement and distaste, the instinctive shrinking that a woman like April Panhasard must inevitably feel at the suggestion of an intrigue with a class below her own, she experienced a sense of thankfulness at remaining unrecognized.

She stole a glance at Candida, but evidently no inkling of the truth had pierced her friend's serenity, as she leaned back in her chair, glad to rest from the labours of the day. The waitress had disappeared, an empty tray in hand; the book-keeper was busy with a ledger before her.

April drew a deep sigh of relief. Outwardly the position was unchanged.

She tried to face the facts with an unprejudiced eye. But under all her broad-mindedness and the simple word "flirtation" she could not rid herself of a harder prejudice—a fear, sinister and remote, that the little scene she had witnessed was no mere passing folly of youth and environment.

It was the key-note to what she had always feared, the instability of the man's moral character; that material weakness that lay under so much that was idealistic and strong.

She looked at the girl again as she came back with the tea. She was certainly not of a class that needs no label. Undeniably pretty, without meretricious

aid, with the charm of youth and freshness and a certain simplicity, she nevertheless could not aspire to gentle birth, for all her assumed air of lofty self-possession.

From the people she came: with her manicured nails, her carefully-chosen speech, her boldly-carried head. "Lady-like" she was, but never like a lady.

That Boris Majendie should stoop to trifle with her, that she should without hesitation accept it as her right, added an air of custom to the simple little scene that was not without significance to a woman of the world.

And quite suddenly April remembered the picnic in the woods and Majendie's attitude of devotion to herself. She had the curious sensation of having been betrayed, conscious notwithstanding of the exaggeration it implied.

Running along this line of thought she saw how solitude could warp the sense of perspective within a woman's mind—attach false values to the ways and words of men. And hurting herself deliberately she drove the moral home. To *think* that a boy like Majendie could really care for her!

Meanwhile Candida drank her tea, contented to be silent, happily unconscious of the mental condition of her companion.

The incident by her had long since been forgotten. She had not noticed Majendie pass behind her chair and even had she done so it is doubtful whether she would have recognized a man with whom she had exchanged but a few brief words.

Only once did her thoughts recur to the waitress in the tea-shop, as they drove towards the station surrounded by their parcels.

"‘Chloe’—what a curious name for a girl of her class."

April looked at her thoughtfully for a moment before replying.

"To what class would you say she belonged?" she asked.

"Oh—the small shop-keeper one—perhaps not even that—some little farmer’s daughter come up to town with a greed for London life—apparently enjoying the process heartily!"

She laughed and then with a sudden touch of gravity: "Isn’t it odd how men care to flirt with those beneath them? So different to us. The mere idea of laughing, say, with a chauffeur or a footman gives one a shivery feeling all down one’s spine. Men are contradictory creatures. I don’t suppose we ever *really* grow to understand them." And she gave a sudden sigh, thinking of Newcomen.

They caught their train easily, found the car waiting for them at the Junction and parted in the dusk at Mrs. Newcomen’s door, where the Bosun in defiance of rules and regulations was perched on the gate waiting for a peep at his "Darling" before he went to bed.

To April was left the lonely return to the dark and empty house.

It seemed to her indeed more desolate than ever with this shadow of mistrust that hung about her

friend. In vain she tried to escape the depression of her mood as she went down the wide staircase to her solitary dinner.

And there upon the table she found a single letter, written in the well-known, hurried hand.

Half-eagerly, half-distastefully she opened it and read it.

"Very dear liege lady"—so the words ran—"I am longing to see you again—absurdly hopeful that you will, on the instant, sit down to that Chippendale bureau and taking up a scratchy—but thrice-blessed pen!—indite the magic word that means so much to me.

"It won't need time, it won't entail thought. Just 'Come'—on a sheet of lilac paper.

"And behold!—by the next train—or whatever train you wish—(an Express for choice—but indeed, no matter!)—a traveller will emerge at Coddell-in-the-Dale—to wit—

"Your lonely . . . 'Cousin'

BORIS."

CHAPTER XIV

NEXT morning she woke early. The sun was pouring in at the edges of the blind and a busy party of jack-daws in the high trees outside filled the air with their incessant chatter.

She went to the window and threw it wide open and at the slight noise the birds rose in a cloud of fluttering wings and moved off to settle again on the moss-grown roof of the stables where they renewed their important conference.

The young day smiled back in April's face as she stood for a moment looking out over the dewy lawn, the sky clear and radiant, the scene so bathed in summer glory that her spirit leaped in response and, hurrying over her dressing, she crept out noiselessly by the landing door and down into the garden.

The only note of life besides a fat brown thrush, scientifically engaged in the murder of a snail, was added by a bark of recognition from Esau, warming his shaggy coat in the sunshine outside his kennel.

She loosed the sheep-dog, who bounded about her in clumsy ecstasy, and together they turned down the drive and out into the open road beyond. The clear air blew in her face, the sun shone down upon her and she felt that peculiar exhilaration that comes from being abroad before the world's astir.

The depression of overnight had completely passed away, leaving in its place a slight feeling of shame as she recalled to mind her pessimistic mood. She could think now of Majendie's flirtation with a smile and find a touch of humour in the boy's last letter—even a trace of pity as she thought of dead, dispirited London where he lingered on, and compared the fresh beauty of the country scene about her.

Quite suddenly she wished that he were there trudging along the narrow lane between hedges wet with dew, where the traveller's joy, with its feathery tufts, sparkled like a veil diamond-strewn, and the scent of the moist earth rose like incense on the air.

A hare crossed the road in short hurried bounds towards a field of corn that was slowly ripening, and Esau, with a bark of joy, started in pursuit.

"Come back—come to heel! Good dog . . .!" she cried, cracking the whip she carried to enforce the command; and a voice answered her own, greeting her from round a bend of the road.

"Good morning, Mrs. Panhasard! You are out early—but isn't it just a crackerjack of a day?"

Van Someren's tall figure was bearing down upon her, broad shoulders squarely set, the thoughtful face lit up with a smile of pleased surprise.

"Well—this *is* good. You going for a walk? And Esau too . . ." as the dog crept back through a gap in the torn hedge. "May I be permitted to join you?" He shook her outstretched hand.

"I was just wishing for a companion," said April happily, "someone to witness my extraordinary vir-

tue! Why is it, I wonder, one feels so righteous at rising early in the morning?—as if one had achieved a feat unheard-of before!"

"I suppose it's the sensation of getting even with Time—which always means being a pace ahead of the rest of mankind."

"What you call 'getting a hustle on,'" April laughed back at him, as he turned and fell into step quietly by her side.

"Or 'shaking a leg,'" Van Someren suggested, his eyes upon her face, flushed with the quick exercise and gay beyond its wont.

"And that reminds me, you'll never guess what I came out to see?—the reason for what you call my 'extraordinary virtue.'"

"No, what?" They paused for a moment instinctively, by a stile where a foot-path crossed the fields, winding into the dale, a sudden break in the high wall of hedge.

"I've been abroad for two hours already, on my own wild adventure."

He swung himself on to the topmost rail, worn smooth by many a country pair and scored deep with names.

"Will you try it?" he asked her with a laugh, holding out his hands, "it's quite easy and you can rest against that post."

For a moment April hesitated, then, half-amused at herself, yielded to the temptation.

"It's years since I sat on a stile!" she said merrily, turning a little so as to gaze across the fields—"and

what a lovely view." She gave a start of surprise that nearly threatened her balance.

"Oh!" she cried joyously—"the Hounds! Don't you see them? They're right away over there in the hollow by the spinney . . ."

Van Someren followed her gesture, eager as herself. Against the purple background of the distant woods, little specks of scarlet came and went, horses moved in scattered twos and threes and faintly on the breeze they heard the music of hounds giving tongue—that stirring, quivering note that grips a man's heart.

A horn shrilled across it and the busy group dispersed; a faint streak of mottled white that moved close to earth, the pink coats behind it and, with a gap between, the dark wave of riders spreading out in a fan.

April's cheeks were flushed, her breath came fast. "Cubbing"—she said in a tense voice, her eyes straining after.

"And that's precisely what I came out to see," Van Someren's voice was full of amused despair, "I missed the road somehow and wandered up here. Still, I've had my reward," he added under his breath.

But April did not heed him. "I wish they'd come this way." She watched the last horseman vanish into the dale and drew a breath of open disappointment.

The American laughed softly.

"It seems about the one thing that rouses British

enthusiasm. Racing rides it close and, after that, shooting."

She turned on him with a slightly indignant frown and caught a glance that somehow puzzled her. She could not realise he was revelling in her pleasure, happy that she was happy, content it should be so.

"Next to a horse, a gun," he went on mischievously, "next to a gun," he paused—then risked it—"a woman. That's about the standard as far as I can guess."

"Really?" April's voice was cold. "In America, I suppose this Trinity of excellence is merged in a single cult . . ."

"And that?" He had already regretted his sudden impulse.

"The Almighty Dollar." She gave him an answering glance that was tinged with quiet scorn.

But Van Someren, unmoved, smiled down at her.

"I'm afraid," he said quietly, "I've expressed myself badly. It's up to me now thoroughly to explain."

"Do." She leaned back against the post, idly studying him a little touch of aloofness still about her eyes.

"Well—it's like this——" he stared straight ahead. "It strikes me, coming new to the land, that everything here has to give place to 'good form.' It's a sort of fetish that entails important sacrifices. The covering up of all wholesome feeling, for instance. The only outlet for a man's enthusiasm seems to be on the question of sport."

"Well—even allowing that," April contended, "it hardly warrants your remark concerning my sex."

"It all follows on," Lorry was obstinate. "I can't stand the Englishman's attitude to women. It's full of forms and ceremonies, I'll admit, but what it lacks is simple reverence. With us, you know, women are everything. We put them first, in every way—where they deserve to be."

April's slight irritation died away before the interest she felt.

"And you don't think over here we are treated equally well?"

"No." His mouth shut firmly with the square chin thrust out. "I don't say, mind you, we're any more moral—it's not a question of that—but I do think"—his voice grew gentle—"we're *kinder* to women. I wouldn't have Sister marry an Englishman—not if he were a Duke!"

"Why?" April watched him, wondering a little.

"It's difficult to locate it—it's the national point of view." He frowned, bringing his shaggy brows sternly together, trying to elucidate the difference he felt.

"In America, as I have said, we worship our women. In England it seems to me you worship your men. You spoil them, utterly," his words came quicker—"it's tradition, I reckon, and a lot of other things. They still pose as the Lords of Creation, expecting a sort of homage from the so-called weaker sex. I remember on board ship, there was a pretty little woman, English—a 'grass-widow' she called herself—and she was talking to sister one night when I was by and she said laughingly: 'If you want to

see as little of any one man as possible, marry him, my dear. It's never been known to fail!"

"Of course she was half in fun, but somehow her speech stuck and I've often thought since it didn't lie any. For an Englishman doesn't make a *comrade* of his wife. She's something between a toy and an unpaid housekeeper! He don't want her company outside his front door—it's 'bad form,' to begin with, to be tied to his wife's side. But he likes to find her there when he comes back home, and his house pretty and bright, and the bills kept down. There's not much worship in it—it's a matter of convenience—and once the courtship's over, she's stranded, to my mind. You go to a smart restaurant any night in the week—you'll hardly find a single pair who are just husband and wife! Where married people are in it it's always a square party. They don't chum around alone anywhere. Now I don't say there's no real love to be found, but I do say this: that this Fetish 'Good form' takes the place of natural affection. For what does a man marry for if it's not to be together—to enjoy his wife's company more than any other? That's where your lower classes are far more human; they aren't afraid to let it be seen they're fond of one another. We work for our women, and work for them hard—they aren't just conveniences for our own creature comforts, and although we can't afford the time for much social work, we *share* our pleasures when they come—and enjoy them the more!"

Something sturdy and resolute in the man's whole attitude caught April's attention as she sat there lis-

tening. Not a little of his argument found an echo in her heart, but her innate patriotism forbade open agreement.

"I like to hear two points of view"—so she temporised—"but you know we say in England that you go to extremes; that the American woman rides rough-shod over men—looks upon them in fact as the cashiers of her pleasure."

"And why shouldn't we be?" said Van Someren simply, "what's the use of work, or money or fame if we can't make the woman we love all the happier for it?"

April laughed suddenly, but her eyes were very bright.

"It's a new idea," she smiled, "you must give me time to absorb it."

For a second he looked at her with a straight powerful glance.

"It's *my* idea," he said, and his voice vibrated.

A silence fell between them, broken at last by the sound of trotting hoofs.

A dog-cart was approaching and April jumped down to lay a warning hand on Esau's collar.

The doctor saw the pair and pulled up quickly. "Good-morning, Mrs. Panhasard, 'morning, Van Someren. You are out early—you put me to shame." He smiled at them out of a tired face that the clear light lined with merciless precision.

"How's that, Doctor?" asked the American.

"Well—you're up and I'm just going to bed! For an hour or two, at least, if I can fit it in.

Don't tell Mrs. Moneypenny or there'll be a village scandal!"

"Some errand of mercy?" April suggested sweetly. She patted the chestnut mare who turned her head towards her, knowing by instinct an experienced caress.

The Doctor nodded and, realising sympathy, felt a little of the burden slip from his weary shoulders.

"A case of D. T.," he said bluntly. "Such a good chap, too!—I've been with him all night."

Van Someren's face stiffened. Drink was a pet aversion of his, and somehow he resented the mention of it to April. But, to his surprise, she shewed no symptom of a woman's usual recoil.

"Poor fellow!" she said gently—"what a terrible curse it is."

The Doctor's capable face softened at her words. Broadmindedness to him was the Gateway to Heaven.

"You're right there, Mrs. Panhasard—and, in this instance, doubly so. It's hereditary, you see, which makes it all the harder . . ."

"Still," said Van Someren carelessly, "I suppose if he fought against it, really started in to pull himself together . . ."

The Doctor snorted. "He *can't*." His voice was harsh—"not without outside help. And even then——" He shrugged his shoulders with a touch of helplessness. "I wonder"—he looked the American shrewdly in the face—"when people will really wake up to the fact of its being a disease and not

merely vicious instincts or weakness of the will. That's the rock on which all Temperance ships founder. When the patient gets beyond a certain stage you might as well condemn a man for inheriting consumption!"

Van Someren was silent, weighing the doctor's words, but a curious, strained expression had come into April's face.

"I quite agree with you." She looked with a touch of despair into the kind eyes above her. "Do you think there will ever be found a real and permanent cure?"

The Doctor stared past her to the quiet fields beyond.

"Outside the use of drugs and forcible restraint I know of only two. And every now and then, by the mercy of God, they pull a man through."

"And those?"

He started at the anxiety in her voice. And suddenly he realised that the question was one that touched her very closely.

"The fear of death," he answered solemnly, "or the love of a woman."

"Ah . . . !" said April. Her hand went up to her throat, as though the muslin collar stifled her.

Van Someren watched her with a lover's anxious eyes. She looked so white and startled he had murder in his heart as he realised that the Doctor's speech had somehow shaken her.

But almost immediately she pulled herself together, addressing the latter in her clear, even voice,

"Well—we mustn't be keeping you out of bed. You're very tired, I'm sure, and ought to be getting home."

"Not at all"—he stooped down from the cart and shook her outstretched hand—"it's been a pleasure to have met you—a little ray of sunshine after a dark night. Good-bye, Mrs. Panhasard." He nodded to Van Someren, standing stolidly beside her, and touched the chestnut mare lightly with his whip.

But, as he turned the corner of the road, his smile faded away as he shook his grey head.

"Poor soul!" he said to himself. "That's the trouble, is it? Her husband, perhaps, or father . . . I read it in her face."

CHAPTER XV

VAN SOMEREN parted from April at the entrance to the drive. He had to hurry back to breakfast with his sister before catching the morning train to town. But this early walk was destined to be the first of many others, filled with a sense of novelty to the lady of the Landslide.

For she learned the views first-hand of a nation not her own; of a quicker, younger race that had yet to pass through the test of experience, but held the virtues as well as the faults of its immaturity; and although they argued hotly from motives of patriotism each gained respect for the other in the process. For they had this in common: honest thought and purpose, a clear vision of mankind, a definite hope for the future—no set religious creed but a certainty that somewhere a Power moved slowly with a perfect Plan of Good.

Many prejudices were weighed and abandoned as they paced side by side, absorbed in earnest talk. Moreover April was forced to admit that, on questions regarding her sex, Van Someren's point of view found a far-off echo in the dreams and ideals of her own girlhood days.

The care he took of her in their long rambles together, his unfailing steady respect and a certain un-

selfishness rare in the men she knew, caused her to realise that his boast of American chivalry went deeper than mere words.

Her husband's vacillating character had forced her early in married life to the conclusion that she must learn to depend entirely on herself. And, although her own strong nature rose to the secret call, she had never known the restfulness of body and of mind, that many a woman owes to a man's love and care.

Now for the first time she came in daily contact with a type less familiar; a capable, shrewd and essentially virile being, moved by a deeply protective instinct towards the weaker sex.

She knew that many a man can temporarily rise to supreme heights of altruism towards one woman whose favour he desires; but to extend the same, as a natural right, to all womankind for no personal profit but as a plain rule of life evoked her wonder and gave her food for thought.

She did not blind herself to the fact that Van Someren admired her—she accepted it as a part of their steadily-growing friendship; but she found it difficult to gauge her feelings in return.

She liked the man immensely, realising his worth. Yet at times she felt ruffled by a certain unconscious roughness, a want of social tact that jarred upon her taste.

It was the New world at issue with the Old: wholesome and vigorous but lacking the "patine" of age. Instinctively it shocked her; his indifference to tradition, his democratic creed, and the downright practical

outlook with which he faced problems that a polite world is contented to ignore. Not that he ever in word or deed could be considered coarse. The man was clean to the depths of his soul, but innocent of veneer.

Nevertheless moments there were when April felt strangely humble before his earnest views of life, his imperishable ideals. And she grew to enjoy more and more their early walks together, braced by his steady friendship, his utter care of her; sleeping the sounder for the knowledge that she would wake next day to wander forth in a dew-washed world with this strong new friend of hers.

When Majendie came on the scene the plot thickened somewhat.

He arrived one night by the evening train after an open invitation from April in the morning.

"Any day." She had written and he needed no second bidding.

She welcomed him heartily but, sensitive to a fault, he noticed the slight difference in her manner towards him, a hint of change that in no way impaired her friendliness but seemed to ring a knell on the old intimacy.

He swallowed it in silence, exerting all his charm; witty, daring, pathetic he rang the chords in turn. And indeed there was something strangely lovable about him. He seemed as flawlessly cut in body and in mind as some rare stone bearing the mark of a master's workmanship.

April felt herself sinking under the old spell as

the clever tongue ran on, the dark eyes watched her. All his personal magnetism rose in self-defence, his knowledge of women, his hidden passion for her.

He was purely delightful—there was no doubt about it! Her feet danced to the tune that he piped like a mischievous faun.

The very contrast of his gay flippant talk, the polished words he used and his subtle sense of humour seemed like a breath of the old world after her excursion into the new: provided that atmosphere of leisure and of culture that, somehow, Van Someren's deeper nature missed.

She laughed, she scolded, she un-thawed, her eyes bright with amusement as they sat together long after the coffee had been cleared, still in the dining-room before the cheerful fire. For the day had turned in cold with one of those bleak evenings that England grants to summer in a moment of forgetfulness.

"I love it," said Majendie, spreading out his hands before the blaze, delicate fingers with long nails, artistic as his mind. "There's something about a fire that stirs the domestic instinct. I'm utterly happy tonight my dear, thanks be to you."

He threw the end of his cigarette into the heart of the coals, and slipped down on to the rug in one of his easy attitudes, his handsome face towards her as she lay back in the chair. Her cheeks were warm with the glow that played upon her hair, drawing sparks of light from her little beaded shoes that rested

on the curb, and darting off again to linger on the white hands folded on her lap.

"The fire—and you," he went on lightly, "bring to the surface the best that in me lies. I feel like a holy cherub worshipping at your feet; one of those creatures, all head and wings, you see on a carved oak screen. Albeit just happily aware that I possess a body too—holding on tightly to my remnant of a heart!"

"About so big . . . I fancy." She laughed back at him, drawing an invisible circle in the air—"a little chipped and threadbare, like most young men's, but able to beat loyally on behalf of a friend."

"Well, you should know best." He looked straight into her eyes, his own slightly dilated, his mouth in a whimsical smile. "It passed into your keeping many moons since. I leave it to you to judge it—to break it if you choose."

"Boris!—" she stirred in her chair, "you're not to talk like that."

"Can't help it tonight. Just listen to the wind!" For it moaned in the open chimney like a spirit that was chained. "It always frightens me—that horrid, lonely sound. I want comforting badly: you might be a little kind. . . ." He stretched a daring hand up on to her knee, taking her reluctant fingers in his own.

"How cold they are!" his voice grew suddenly tender—"in front of this blazing fire. I tell you what, April"—he began to chafe them gently—"you're overdoing it with these ridiculous morning walks. It's not

good for you; you can't burn the candle at both ends!" For, somewhat unwisely, she had mentioned her excursions with Van Someren. "You can see how serious I think it when I fall back on well-worn platitude."

"My hands are always cold." She drew them quietly away—"it's a want of vitality, or perhaps old age!"

"Or the nature of April. Cold hands and a warm heart?"

He leaned against the corner of her chair, his eyes still on her face, wistful brown eyes that studied her intently.

"What a beautiful name it is." He repeated it thoughtfully—"it suits you somehow better than Petronilla."

And in a low voice he began to quote those lines that breathe the very soul of sunshine and Spring showers:

"‘April, April,
Laugh thy girlish laughter
Then, the moment after,
Weep thy golden tears.
April, that mine ears
Like a lover greetest,
If I tell thee, sweetest,
All my hopes and fears;
April, April,
Laugh thy golden laughter,
Then, the moment after,
Weep thy golden tears.’"

The music of it ceased. But it seemed that neither of them cared to break the silence that followed—that rarer praise than speech.

The wind moaned in the chimney and the high trees without creaked and groaned in the riotous summer gale.

A coal fell with a little clatter on the hearth and quite suddenly Majendie stirred as though awakened from his dreams. His hands went out and he gripped each arm of April's chair as he leaned over her, his face white and strained.

"Oh, my dear—my dear——" he cried, "I do love you so. Oh April—April!——"

It was impossible to mistake the note of sincerity in his voice, the passionate pleading of the eyes so near her own.

Her first instinct, that of self-protection—the far-off inheritance of Eve—sent her hands swiftly to his shoulders to thrust him back and away from her.

Then tact came to her aid, together with a curious pity, driving away fear.

"I hope not." Her voice was grave, her steady eyes held him motionless.

"You mustn't forget, Boris . . . everything." The veiled appeal to his chivalry disarmed the man. He drew back a little, feeling the rebuff.

"I don't." His face grew hard. "I couldn't resist telling you. That's all. But I think you must have guessed . . . the truth, long ago."

Watching him, she was conscious with a stab of

self-reproach that she had judged him lightly, misunderstanding him.

And slowly, almost remorsefully, she shook her head.

"Well . . . you do now." He rose to his feet and standing tall and straight before her, with that touch of ribaldry never far removed in a complex nature like his from moments of deep emotion.

"So the 'cat's out of the box,' as Monsieur d'Haricot says!"

A quick feeling of revulsion seized her.

No woman worthy of the name can listen quite unmoved to a man's declaration of love. Whether or no the feeling be returned it is a supreme tribute to her personality. And to a thoughtful mind the seriousness of the situation with the fear of giving pain holds a definite note of responsibility.

That he should stoop to jest the very moment after came as a shock to April's self-respect.

"Ah well. . . ." She smiled with a hint of scorn. "I'm glad to see you're not really serious. And I think now—" she glanced at the clock, "it's time to say good-night."

She stood beside him, her hand outstretched, her manner one of half-amused indulgence. Years rolled between them telescopically. Boris cursed in the depths of his angry soul.

"Certainly. I mustn't keep you up. Especially in view of your early morning walk." He smiled with an effort that pointed the jealous speech. "Forgive

my digression in the realms of romance—that poem of William Watson's is largely responsible."

But his sensitive lips quivered as he spoke, betraying the pain he tried in vain to hide.

The impulse of her generous heart drove her to heal a wound that was mainly self-inflicted, and her new-born dignity vanished in the pity that she felt.

"Boris . . ." her voice pleaded—"I don't know what to say. I can't scold you tonight—and yet. . . ." She paused, searching for words, "I can't bear the thought that our friendship may suffer. You have been so much to me—so loyal and true. . . . I wouldn't have you misunderstand me for the world! But we mustn't play with fire, boy," she almost whispered the words—"not you . . . and I, Boris, dear."

The earnestness of her speech, the appeal of her sad, blue eyes, roused all that was fine in Majendie's curious nature. He guessed too the hidden thought that lay behind the words—that this must be the end of their long intimacy.

"I know," he said, "I know. . . . And it's all my fault. But don't drive me away. I couldn't bear that! If you only guessed what you are to me—the one good thing: clean, exquisite, sweet in my . . . God knows what of a life!" The tears stood in his brown eyes as he looked down at her. "I promise that I'll never . . . worry you again—you needn't be afraid—I mean what I say. If only you'll put up with me . . . and all my rotten ways. . . ." His voice

broke; his boyish, badly-chosen words shewed her but too plainly how deeply he was moved.

"Put up with you?" She laid her hand quietly in his, "I ask for nothing better than to have you for my friend."

For a moment they stood there looking at one another, conscious of the danger which had passed over them. Conscious too they were entering on a new lease of comradeship, a nearer understanding than had yet reigned between them.

Nevertheless, in her heart, as she went up to bed, April wondered dimly if she had chosen well. She could not bring herself to drive the boy away. His pitiful speech had altered her intention. The consciousness that her influence was good and her own affection for him became strong factors in the case. Had he been an older man the way stood clear, but she shrank from a parting forced upon her by a few ardent words, knowing that the heart of youth is quickly lost and won, believing that his love for her was but a passing phase.

For she could not quite rid herself of a certain memory connected with the tea-shop and the fair-haired waitress there; it forced a note of frivolity that confused the main issue. She resolved simply to see less of Majendie, without openly breaking the friendly link between them. And full of this idea she sat down forthwith and wrote a note to Miss Van Someren, inviting her and her brother to a picnic next day. This would shorten, she felt, the long tête-à-tête before Boris should return to town. For

a moment she wondered what the American would advise. Then smiled at herself as she pictured the two men. The contrast between them was not without humour. But she added a brief postscript excusing herself from an early morning walk that they had planned together for the day following.

Which perhaps betrayed which way her fancy veered. . . .

CHAPTER XVI

"AND how is John the Baptist?" Majendie asked politely.

John the Baptist was the swan that lived on the island below the Van Somerens' house. The American girl had bestowed the title upon him in consideration of the fact that he was a staunch adherent to the Doctrine of Total Immersion.

"Joanna, you mean?" Majendie was conscious of fresh mischief in her fair smiling face as he sculled her along in his hostess' boat through the sunny afternoon.

"Joanna is quite well, thank you."

"Why this sudden metamorphosis?" Majendie enquired. "Was she a Rosamund in disguise? It's rather alarming to me."

"Don't you worry any!" Miss Van Someren laughed. "Personally, I consider the original name more fitting, but we couldn't keep to it, see? She's gotten three eggs and is sitting on them in a nest among the willows. Something had to be done, so we changed it to Joanna."

"How delightfully practical you Americans are!" Majendie's voice was grave. "Now, I should never have dreamed of that. I should just have continued to call her John the Baptist and ignored all the rest!—

a neat example, by the way, of orthodox British propriety."

"But we're real proud of her," said Miss Van Someren gaily. "And I'd sooner be a 'Joanna' any day than a 'John'." She gazed ahead up the shining reach of water. "I wonder whenever Lorry means to stop. He's rowing as if he were out for a race."

"I believe that knot of trees beyond the mill is the place Mrs. Panhasard has chosen for tea." He darted a look over his shoulder, measuring the distance between the boats. "We're coming up with them fast despite this unwieldy old tub."

He settled down again to his work, the sun dancing on the little waves turned up by the sculls, the wide old rowlocks creaking under his efforts.

On either side green meadows lay, moon-daisies peering above the high grass, bright patches of poppies flaunting down the borders of the hedge. The meadow-sweet and wild thyme that clustered on the bank filled the warm air with its sharp, sweet scent, and great clusters of Herb-Robert and flowering rush dipped to the water's edge, where already the wet brambles had caught the Autumn tints, adding a vivid blood-red note to the moist clay beneath.

The American girl leaned back in the boat, basking in the heat. She watched Majendie with a calm and reflective eye as he swung backwards and forwards, his thoughts far away.

He was so obviously indifferent to her society that she could not resist a certain sense of amusement. Long ago she had guessed his feelings towards the

lady she called the "Peach," and not an atom of pique disturbed her tranquil mind. He was definitely pigeon-holed as "Mrs. Panhasard's beau," and with that feminine esprit-de-corps typical of her nation she was interested in the affair merely as a spectator. In her heart of hearts, she fostered the notion of his attachment to their hostess, realising, with a shadow of apprehension, that her own brother bid fair to become a victim.

For, much as she liked and admired the lady at the Landslide, she did not welcome the idea of a serious entanglement.

Her thoughts turned ever towards her native land; she wished for no further anchor to hold them in British ports. Provided it were not serious, she nevertheless reflected that it did Lorry good to take an interest in the opposite sex. His distaste for all flirtations hitherto had made him at times severe towards her own. Now—she smiled to herself—he was growing broader-minded. But she could not bear to think that suffering might ensue. He would "take love hard" so she expressed herself—as seriously as he took all other grave questions. Therefore Majendie and his suit were open to encouragement and she smiled at him sweetly from her end of the boat.

"Say, I'm getting broiled!—can you reach that parasol?"

He drew his sculls into one hand and leaning back dragged it out from underneath his coat where it lay beside the tea-hamper in the bows. He cast a glance as he did so in search of the distant boat.

"They've stopped." He gave a sigh of relief as he handed the sunshade across.

"Cheer up!" said Miss Van Someren. She looked him laughingly in the face and added: "We shall soon be with 'the peach'."

Majendie colored underneath his tan.

"Well, it's pretty warm work rowing on a day like this." His voice was perhaps more ungracious than he knew.

"If I were an English girl," the other went on smoothly, "*I* should be rowing, I guess, and *you'd* be sitting here. But then I'm a free-born American. And it's *vurry* good for you! It makes me tired to see the way your women-folk behave."

"Oh—come now," Majendie was fairly taken aback. "I don't think we're slackers—not by any means. And as to your suggesting that our sex is 'spoilt', that's just because in *your* country it's the other way round."

"Sure, and the right way too." She laughed triumphantly, showing a row of white pointed teeth. Cool and dainty she sat there, immensely self-possessed.

"Is there anything else you would like?" Majendie's voice was bored, as she opened the rose-coloured sunshade and smiled from beneath its shade.

"Heaps," said Miss Van Someren, with an expressive wave of her hand, "an iced drink, for instance, and the comfortable reflection that I'm not here merely to balance the ship."

Majendie's eyes twinkled, and the boat moved on. "You're not much good for that though you'd make

an excellent cox. About seven stone two, I should say."

Miss Van Someren dropped the steering ropes and, despite the pink sunshade, clapped her little hands.

"A compliment!" she addressed the blue sky. "Actually a compliment. At last!"

"Oh—if that's all you want I might make a further effort."

"Try," said the girl sweetly as they ran into the bank.

"Well, shall we say that your steering," he pushed out vigorously, "approaches an originality that's purely exceptional."

"Not bad—for an Englishman," she conceded the point. And here a hail reached them from Van Someren himself.

"Hurry up, you two—we want our tea. Seems to me Sister's gotten you into trouble!" He same striding along the bank towards them. In the distance they could see Mrs. Panhasard's white frock outlined against the dark clump of trees.

"Throw a rope out—I'll give you a tow. . . ."

"Never!" said Majendie with scorn. For the other's activity was contagious.

"Let a man contend to the uttermost
For his life's set prize, be it what it will!"

"Say!" Miss Van Someren's face lit up. "That's Browning, I guess."

"Guess again," Majendie suggested.

"You won't rattle Sister that way," said her brother from the bank. "She's belonged to a Browning Club since she was sixteen."

"I give in," said Boris humbly, "as ever in the face of knowledge. I must confess that Browning is rather beyond me." He looked down mischievously at the girl.

"Now do you mean to tell me, seriously, that you can follow all his longer work. Sordello, for instance?" His face was quizzical.

"We . . . ll," she considered the question gravely. "Here and there I opine he's open to doubt. But he's the finest poet you've got—he's IT, we reckon."

Majendie choked and recovered himself. Then with a blank face.

"I'll give you an instance," he said, and appeared lost in thought.

"This will do." He started to declaim the words in a dramatic voice:

"'Oft have I seen an enigmatic bat
Skirl through the zenith in his crystal hat,
While Charon, sailing in his western barge,
Gave to great Hancock's man peculiar charge
To ride full-tilt against Subjunctive Mood,
And fatten padlocks on Antarctic food.'"

Slowly as he proceeded the pretty face changed, bewilderment giving place to indignation and finally to amused appreciation.

"Ah . . .!" She said as solemnly when he came to a pause. "It wants a British mind thoroughly to

appreciate it. It's so vurry British in sentiment—so terribly uncompromising. Happen Mrs. Panhasard might be able to assist. She's probably accustomed to the writings of . . . Majendie!"

And with this she stepped out of the boat on to the bank.

April greeted them gaily. She had enjoyed her long row with Van Someren, who had been in his most optimistic mood. Business had been going well with him of late and another secret hope, that threaded its way through all his future dreams, seemed to gain form and colour from the radiant Summer day.

"Well—you *have* taken your time!—we've been here half an hour."

She addressed Majendie, who smiled ruefully.

"What with running into the bank and having my leg pulled the entire way it was distinctly an acrobatic feat. But being in charge of the commissariat we felt tolerably sure of you in the end."

They landed the tea-hamper and started to unpack.

"Woe worth the day!" said Boris suddenly. "They've forgotten the milk." He held up the empty flask with a dramatic gesture. "Now what's to happen? If you'd followed my suggestion—" he looked at April severely—"and just packed whiskey and soda this could never have occurred."

"There's a farm over there." Van Someren was practical. "It's only two fields off." He stood up. "Give me the bottle. I'll be back by the time the kettle's boiling."

"A great thought." Majendie struggled to his feet.

"I'll come too," he announced, "milk the cow, if necessary."

"We'll all go," said April, "as soon as the fire's lighted—that is," she turned to her other guest—"if you think you'd like a walk? I'm so sorry that this has happened—it's very careless of Mary Tuckett—I shall have to scold her."

"Oh please don't—it all adds to the fun." Miss Van Someren slipped a hand through her brother's arm. Seeing which Majendie's face cleared. The narrow foot-path by the river drove them into pairs and he found himself leading the way by April's side.

"We'd better skirt this hedge I think. The farmer won't bless us if we go through his hay-field. It will save us a good step and the grass is quite dry."

He glanced approvingly at April's well-shod feet.

"Anyone can see you're a real country-woman."

"You don't say!" she mimicked the pair who followed in their wake, her voice too low to reach their ears. "What a nice child she is!—and pretty too—so dainty in her way."

"Yes, Grandmamma." He looked askance at her. "We're only waiting for your blessing now."

For he had guessed the thought that underlay her words.

"And talking of blessings . . ." he peeped over the hedge and drew back quickly, his face aglow with mischief, one hand upraised to silence the little party.

"Sh!" he whispered. "Trespassers will be prosecuted—but oh! do come—gently—and look."

Gingerly they peered through the thin screen of hawthorn.

Below them, on a mound of new-cut hay, the plump figure of Mr. Puddephatt reposed. And not, alas!—alone.

For seated close beside him, her mouse-coloured head supported by his shoulder, was Matilda, the Beauty—the Vicar's “Right Hand.”

Their backs were turned to their delighted audience and one arm of the curate in its dark grey sleeve was passed firmly round Matilda's ample waist.

Beyond stretched the field in peaceful solitude, with the distant farm and its grey roof and tumbled-down cow-sheds. To the left a small plantation of spruce protected the lovers from the curious eyes of man. A Sabbath-like calm brooded over them; they seemed as much a part of the scene as the hay-ricks themselves, complacent, plump and self-absorbed as two young sheep. Little they recked that tragedy crept close to their “*pastorale!*” But Majendie's quick eyes, at that moment, had discovered a moving figure approaching, dressed in “sober black.” “Look!” he whispered dramatically. “It *is . . . I'm sure it is!*”

Unheeded, unconscious herself, from the other side of the firs, a slight and angular person moved quickly towards them.

There was no mistaking the curious hat she wore, a bonnet without strings, independent of the seasons, but enhanced in summer-time by a frugal bunch of lilac, in winter by the presence of some starved red berries.

"Mrs. Noah herself," Miss Van Someren gasped.
"Oh dear, oh dear—isn't it just fierce?"

"Something must be done," Majendie said hurriedly. "She'll be on them in a minute. Lie low—all of you—and leave it to me!"

He was off, running like a hare, whilst the three behind watched him breathlessly.

He sprang through a gap in the hedge level with the firs and then, apparently, went deliberately mad.

"Oh—oh—oh!" he yelled, his back discreetly turned towards the young couple. "It's a wasp!—damn it all!" and commenced to caper wildly.

Mr. Puddephatt leaped to his feet; Matilda, with an activity that seemed incredible, fled into safety behind the high hedge, there to find herself confronted by Mrs. Panhasard and her friends.

She gave them one wild glance and took to her heels, as hard as she could go, her round face crimson.

"Oh—oh—oh!" yelled Majendie gallantly as Mrs. Moneypenny turned the corner of the firs and quickened her steps with a magisterial air.

"Young man!" she cried, and then again still more sternly: "Whatever *is* the matter? You must stop this behaviour."

"I can't," moaned Majendie, "it's the devil and all!"

"How *disgraceful* of him!" sobbed April, overcome with mirth. "Look at the Curate's face—oh—do look. . . ."

For Mr. Puddephatt, regaining his dignity, was approaching the pair from the rear with magnificent composure.

The vicar's wife—to do her justice—realised that the victim's suffering was acute.

Majendie was holding his leg firmly with both hands.

"It's crawled up," he said in a loud anguished voice, "I daren't let go and I can't kill the brute—oh—oh! there it is again!"

Mrs. Moneypenny fell upon her knees.

Practical in an emergency she knew what to do. She clasped Majendie tightly round the calf.

"Look for it," she commanded, "look for it at once."

Gingerly the young man disclosed a purple sock. "Ahem!" said the curate—now abreast with them. He stopped as though aghast at the sight of his vicar's wife in this extraordinary and compromising position. Mrs. Moneypenny's toque had fallen over her eyes; her face became the colour of a ripe Autumn plum.

"It's a wasp." Her voice was strained and curiously eager. She seemed to be pleading for the curate's understanding.

Majendie winked above the toque into the round pink face and a faint answering twinkle appeared in Mr. Puddephatt's eye.

"Got it!" said the sufferer in an exultant voice as under the curate's steady gaze the lady's hands fell limply to her side.

He shook his leg vigorously and drove his heel into the ground where an imaginary wasp had bitten the dust.

"It's dead," he said in a solemn voice and heaved a

sigh. Then courteously assisted the vicar's wife to her feet.

"I'm deeply indebted to you," he bowed to the lady—"it is Mrs. Moneypenny, is it not?"

But the Vicaress still smarted from a sense of injustice. She gave him a stony stare and straightened her toque. Far away across the fields Matilda's blue dress fluttered out of sight in a bee-line for the vicarage. Mr. Puddephatt smiled pleasantly, conscious of the fact.

"Always helpful," he murmured gently, "ever the Good Samaritan to those in distress-s-s." He had a pulpit habit of leaning on his sibilants.

The little, wizened woman drew herself upright, feeling herself reinstated anew before her world.

"And now, young man," she said, turning to Majendie, "I trust in future you will learn to moderate your language."

"Oh do let's go to the rescue," said Miss Van Someren; "he's such a bright boy!" She stepped through the hedge.

"Say, you hurt any, Mr. Majendie? The British wasp seems to have a pretty active sting."

She looked up innocently into the Vicaress' face as April and Van Someren followed.

The thought of her large audience did not tend to soothe the matron's ruffled sense of propriety. But April came to the rescue with a slight feeling of pity.

"We couldn't see what happened—" she risked the kindly fib, "but we heard him call out and all hurried after."

She ran on smoothly explaining the accident of the empty milk-flask and introduced the Van Somerens to the clerical pair.

And so, as Majendie summed it up later, "All was for the best in the best of possible worlds—and poor old Puddephatt nearly wrung my hand off!"

They made their way to the farm and, completing their purchase, returned to the scene of the picnic, conscious of tea well-earned.

Then, as the shadows deepened, back to the boats again, the brother and sister together "to save," as she explained, "the worry of sorting out" when they should reach the Van Somerens' destination.

It was a fortunate arrangement, as it afterwards transpired, for April's peace of mind received a sudden shock. The heavier boat as usual fell far behind, a manœuvre not entirely unaided by Majendie. And as they passed the island where Joanna lived they narrowly missed the bows of another craft that met them round the willows with unlooked-for speed.

It proved to be a canoe with a deep red sail, steered by an old man who raised his cap courteously.

"My fault," he cried, "so sorry!" and then with a sudden start, "Why, God bless my soul!—it's Petronilla herself!"

Majendie, with a glance at his hostess, obediently shipped his oars and the other man in the canoe let the sail go flapping and, seizing a boat-hook, grabbed at the bank.

The next minute they had drawn alongside and Sir Hugo Gervase was grasping April's hand.

"My dear—this is a pleasure, I thought you were abroad. You remember Kilmarny, surely? Why, you played together as children."

The dark man in the bows nodded his head gaily. "You've not forgotten the apple-pie bed and poor old Fraülein Schmidt?"

His voice, rich and sweet, with a faint Irish brogue, seemed strangely familiar to April's ears.

"Why, you're 'Derry'!" she cried. "Of course I remember now."

"Another god-child," said the old man, "he's keeping me company while the family's at Dinard." He glanced at Majendie, and April introduced him.

"Any relation to 'Chick' Majendie?" he asked. For he was one of the veteran tribe now slowly dying out, to whom a well-known name opens the flood-gates of memory.

"Son—that's all!" Boris smiled back.

"God bless my soul!" Out came his favourite phrase—"Chick's son—well, well. . . ."

He stared at him for a moment. "You've got your grandmother's eyes. Lord, what a handsome woman she was! I remember her in the old days at Cork. Your Russian Granny, I mean. Every boy was in love with her, including meself," he chuckled at the recollection. "I was barely nineteen and she was . . . Heaven knows what! but pretty as paint, with the wittiest tongue—fine havoc she made among us all! And her brother Boris? You wouldn't remember him. He got killed in a duel abroad, about some Viennese woman. . . ."

"I was called after him," Majendie explained, "and I believe when I'm scratched I shew a good layer of Tartar!"

Sir Derrick Kilmarny meanwhile was talking to April.

"I'm only here till the tenth—my wife's at Marienbad, but joins me in Scotland for the twelfth. I'm awfully glad to meet you again. Do come to Sleyd before I depart."

Sir Hugo twisted round.

"Of course she must. Tomorrow, eh, what? Where are you staying, my dear?"

"At a house . . . not far from here." April's cheeks were red. "Everyone thinks I'm abroad. But I'm really having a rest—a quiet time in the country. . . ."

She broke off, painfully conscious of the hawk-like old eyes that were steadily watching her.

"Well, when are you coming to Sleyd?" He stuck to the point obstinately.

April saw that it was impossible to evade the invitation.

"Friday?" she suggested, "would that suit you? And please, may we be alone—just the three of us?" She included Kilmarny in her glance. "The fact is"—she took her courage in both hands—"no one knows I'm here—and I don't want them to! It's the only way to be free from worrying letters," she smiled, "and 'kind advice,' I find."

"And what about this boy?" he touched Majendie's arm. "You'll bring him along with you? I'd like

to have a chat over old times—his father was in my regiment, you know.”

“Sad to say I shan’t be here,” Majendie interposed. “I’m only down for the day, you see. Perhaps some other time. Or if you ever come up to town, Sir, we might meet then?”

He saw with an inward smile what he, somehow, had expected: a shade of relief in Sir Hugo’s face at the form of his excuse. “It would never do,” he said to himself, “he should think I was staying with her. There’s tangle enough as it is without adding to it!”

“And if we don’t take care you’ll miss your evening train.” April seized the excuse, anxious now to depart before they should probe further.

The hint was not lost upon Kilmarny, who drew in the boat-hook and picked up his paddle with a glance at his host.

“Well, we mustn’t keep you, pleasant as it is. You’d better drive through the Bartons’ place,” her Godfather advised, “it will save you over a mile of that long Swatham road. Give my name at the lodge and they’ll let you through. Friday then at two.” They all shook hands.

“Goodbye, Majendie. When you write remember me to your father. Goodbye, my dear, goodbye.” The old man settled himself in the stern as the canoe slid away under Kilmarny’s guidance. Then he twisted round to shout between his hands:

“You’ll have to bring someone with you, mind, to open all those gates.”

The red sail filled with a last touch of colour as they rounded the bend. Then the green islet slipped in between.

"Phew!" said Majendie. "I'm glad *that's* over."

CHAPTER XVII

NOTWITHSTANDING Sir Hugo's warning about the gates, on the Friday morning April set out alone. She decided to drive round by the longer route sooner than risk the chance of gossip between her groom and the servants who might recognise her up at Sleyd Hall.

But as she passed the Newcomens' house the Bosun's voice hailed her. He was sitting on the gate, with a rueful countenance.

"Darling's gone up to town to have her tooth out—I do hope it won't hurt very bad—and she's staying there till tomorrow to meet Skipper. So I'm all alone—and . . ." (this under his breath) "Susan is so cross!"

He looked so small and forlorn, perched on the topmost bar, that Mrs. Panhasard yielded to a sudden impulse.

"Would you like to come with me for a nice long drive?"

The moment the words had passed her lips she realised her mistake.

The effect on the Bosun was electrical. He gave a glad: "*Rather!*" and scrambling down from the gate was in the cart beside her before she could collect her scattering ideas.

She tried a remote chance.

"You must ask Susan first, you know."

"I can't," the Bosun chuckled, "she's gone down the village to see Mother Tuckett. But Griggs will tell her."

He hailed the gardener, mowing the croquet lawn.

"Will you tell Susan when she returns that I've gone with Mrs. Pan. And I shan't be back for *ever* so long!" His voice vibrated with glee. April saw there was no way out of it.

"Not until after lunch," she added to the man. "He'll be all right. I'll see him home myself in time for tea."

"Yes'm—very good, mum." Griggs beamed at the pair. He and Susan were old foes. She was the domestic dragon of Candida's establishment, ruling the place by virtue of long service.

"Goodbye, Griggs." The child cried shrilly over the hedge as the roan cob arched his neck and trotted down the lane.

The Bosun pulled the rug in place and sat up straight beside the lady he adored, as proud a little soul as the world could hold.

"Why—we're going to Swatham!" as she turned the corner sharply to the right.

"Not quite all the way," April explained. "Does your mother happen to know Sir Hugo Gervase?"

"No. Up at Sleyd you mean? We know the Daunceys there. They live in the little house close to the last lodge."

"Well, that's where we're going. To Sleyd Hall for lunch. So you'll be able to shew me the way. Sir

Hugo says if we cross the Bartons' place it's a short cut that saves us over a mile."

"Course it does. There's a lot of gates—those nice swinging ones." He turned his bright face towards her, watching her handle the reins. "When we come to the cross-roads it's round again to the right and up the hill past the lunies' place until the Foxton woods."

"The lunies' place?" She echoed the words with a glance for enlightenment.

The Bosun bit his lip and his face went red. "I forgot. Darling scolds me whenever I call it that."

"But what is it?" Light broke in on her. "A lunatic asylum?"

"Not 'xactly. It belongs to a doctor and he has people to stay who aren't quite right, you know"—he tapped his forehead with a significant gesture—"and people called dip. . . . I can't remember the word." He stuck with a vexed frown. "It's very long and difficult—but I think it means they drink."

"Dipsomaniacs." Her face looked suddenly tired.

"That's it." He gave a shout of joy as a young covey of partridges whirred up behind the hedge.

The roan cob tried to shy but April had him in hand.

"Steady now—steady, Peter." She smoothed his side with the whip.

"One—two—three," and up to seven the boy counted eagerly. "That's Farmer Beeton's land. Skipper shoots there sometimes, and once when they cut the corn I went out with him."

So, with many a winding turn of the narrow country roads, and on through the Bartons' park—a welcome change from the dust of the highway—they came at long last to the lodge of Sleyd Hall.

The drive, moss-grown and ill-kept, ran between meadow-land and a straggling border of woods, where here and there felled trees still lay and the close cut roots of others bore testimony to a recent sale of timber.

A forlorn air of poverty lay over the wide park, with its broken palings and ill-swung gates and the far-off bleak old house.

It looked like a broken-down and shabby gentleman, conscious of noble birth, resentful of his clothes; poor and proud and powerless under the new reign—King Money the usurper with his train of sycophants. Down in the hollow nestled the grey and ruined chapel where the grass grew high above the graves of the long-forgotten dead and on a knoll beyond a pillar of stone crumbled, set there to mark the gallant deed of a hero of the house.

The haunting sadness of it shrouded the countryside like the folds of a mouldy cloak thrown over the face of death and April felt a shiver run across her bones as the great trees closed above them and blotted out the sun.

She was glad when the drive ended at a high hedge of yews, protecting the terraced front of the house and the rose garden between.

On the steps Sir Hugo stood, a spaniel beside him, talking to Kilmarny, who had just returned from a

ride, and the two men came forward to greet the approaching guests.

"I've brought a young neighbor of mine. I knew you wouldn't mind. Take care, Bosun, now," as the child jumped out of the cart, stumbled and would have fallen, had not Kilmarny caught him.

He looked up at the tall man above him; into dark eyes strangely like his own.

"Thank you," he said shyly. "Awfully clumsy of me," and dragged off his sailor cap as they entered the house.

"I think I'm rather early." April glanced at the clock. "It was difficult to judge how long the drive would take."

"All the better, my dear," Sir Hugo answered heartily as they crossed the stone paved hall hung with ancient armour.

"I say!" The Bosun pulled up dead before a figure in shining breastplate and helmet, the quaint visor down, the long pointed boots spurred incredibly.

"Golly! that's fine."

Sir Derrick laughed aloud. "And *this* chap, what d'you think of him?"

He gave a little start as he spoke, looking down at the child. Instinctively his hand went up to his own sleek head, smoothing back the lock that lay, conspicuously white, in the dark hair over his left temple.

"That's odd," he said to himself. "I never saw it before. Just in the same place too. . . ." He watched the boy intently as he darted from the man in armour

to look at a torn banner that hung above a cluster of pikes in the embrasure of the window.

Meanwhile Sir Hugo had led April into the morning-room.

"We can have a chat before lunch." He dragged a chair forward into the deep bay that looked out on the rose garden and clipt yew hedge. "I want to hear all about you, now. It's good to have you here."

April laid a hand lovingly over the gnarled fingers outstretched to her.

"My dear Uncle Hugo, I don't know where to begin."

"Well, first of all, how are you?" He settled himself on the low window seat, his back turned to the light that fell upon her face. "You're looking very sweet and more like a girl than ever! Whatever you've been up to, my dear, it's done you a power of good. Now, let's hear all the story—from the opening scene to the curtain! Eh!—Mrs. Panhasard of Coddell-in-the-dale."

"Oh!" April gasped. "You *know* then . . ." and she paused. Then laughed to her heart's content, conscious of relief.

"How absolutely like you . . ." she choked back her amusement. "How truly Uncle Hugo to ferret it all out!"

"Quite by accident," the old man gave a chuckle. "A caller I had the other day seemed rather worried in mind. Looking upon me apparently as a sort of walking Debrett she aired the name Panhasard and asked for information. Told her I'd never heard of

it and didn't want to either! She wondered if you were fit to mix with the parsonage." He smiled grimly, then, seeing she looked concerned, he went on quickly in a reassuring voice. "Not that Mrs. Money-penny has the faintest suspicions—nor that lumpish daughter of hers with eyes like a Pekingese! But after I met you with that boy I put two and two together. You see she mentioned to me your . . . 'cousin' Mr. Majendie!"

April flushed to the eyes; she looked the picture of guilt. Here was retribution descending with a vengeance.

"The 'cousin' who only 'runs down for the day'?—eh?" He threw his head back and roared at the recollection. "Oh, 'Stormy Petrel'—for shame! I didn't think it of you. I'd like to tell Lady Caroline—'pon me soul, I would. But that's a nice boy—I quite approve your taste! He's 'Chick' all over again with a dash of his Russian Granny."

"Uncle Hugo." April's voice pleaded, but she could not resist the infection of his high spirits. He betrayed beneath his chafing tone such confidence in herself that her own sense of mischief rose in response.

"Well, since you know all about it, there's nothing more to tell."

She drew off her driving gloves and pulled the fingers out.

"There's a little hole in the thumb! Dear me, I'm getting shabby. This leading the simple life is quite demoralising."

She lifted calm, blue eyes to the old man's eager face, reading the curiosity that lay so plainly there.

"And how is Aunt Marion? and when is she coming home? And Theo and her charities? You must tell me all the news."

"You little monkey!" He caught her by the arm. "Out with it now—I'm not to be had by that wheedling way of yours. Besides which"—his face went suddenly grave—"I don't approve of it—it's a bit risky, you know—what's the meaning of this precious masquerade?"

Then she told him the story from beginning up to end, watching the keen old face flash from grave to gay, soften with sympathy and finally settle down into amused disapprobation.

"It won't do," he summed it up, "you take my advice. Of course I quite see how this tangle has occurred, and if it wasn't *you*, I should say 'vogue la galère'! But you don't want to get landed into a serious scrape. Your decree's not absolute yet, you mustn't forget that. Take an old man's advice, and get off abroad. Mix among people who know you again, as a sort of alibi. That parson's wife, for instance; she's a mischievous old hen. And she doesn't love you either. She's suspicious to her boots. You go off abroad and get a fresh maid. Half the worries of life come through the servants' hall. It's gossip, not guilt, my dear, that undoes us all, and it's not the *bad* things we do, it's the *mad* ones that tell. That's the simple truth—you take my word for it."

April nodded her head.

"I suppose you're right. All the same. . . ." She found it difficult to give a sound excuse.

"I don't want to go. I've grown fond of the place." She looked straight past him at the sheltered garden beyond.

Sir Hugo watched her, his eyes narrowing.

There was something more he felt that she had left unsaid.

And presently she went on in a lower tone of voice.

"It's done me . . . worlds of good—a sort of breathing space. I think my nerves, you see, were a little . . . out of hand. The peace . . . it was like a sanctuary—oh, you can't understand!" She hit the arm of her chair a sudden sharp blow. "I don't think anyone knows . . . what I've gone through."

"My poor child," the old eyes filled with tears, and for a moment silence knit them close.

Then the noise of the gong in the hall outside boomed and echoed and died away, startling the pair.

"Lunch!" He rose to his feet. "We'll talk of this later. You must be famished, my dear. Now, where's that boy gone to?"

He strode across to the door, erect and powerful, despite his many years, glad of excuse for action to hide his sudden weakness. For he loved this God-child dearly and he knew the ways of the world. He guessed that gossip hung like a cloud about her name; that the recent case had lost her many a so-called friend. His own wife had stiffened at mention of the suit,

holding fast to the old views, the old desperate creed. "Whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder!" But God to her was the priest who had read the marriage service. She did not pause to consider if the heart of Heaven approved?

Sir Hugo was one of the few who knew what lay beneath, the long years of struggle and sorrow and deadly shame.

He knew her to have attempted that sad heroic task: the salvation of a man caught in the toils of drink.

That she had failed but added to the bitterness of her cup. For she had loved her husband, had hoped against hope!—had watched through the long years his own pitiful struggle, the one step up and the two down, the slow degradation.

She took the broad view of the case—hereditary disease—and threw her whole life into the fighting chance. But after her child's death, her strained nerves gave out and in her physical weakness she lost her influence.

And as though the mainspring controlling his weakened will had snapped, he slipped from her downhill into depths untold. Nevertheless her pride kept the tragedy secret, aided by the cunning of the victim himself. For an atom of self-respect, some far-off inherited strain, sent him away from his own kind when his enemy gained the day. And when the inevitable hour of separation came, she hid the main offence; knowing the law but needed the well-worn vulgar plea, an infidelity that was, in truth, but the last

of many others! So that the world wondered, seeing with envious eyes the luxury she owed mainly to her marriage; saying indulgently she "might have overlooked it," quoting the old adage anent the public wash-house.

All this Sir Hugo Gervase had watched silently, his own desire to help hampered by his wife. For although April called him "Uncle" there was no blood-relationship, no tie beyond the simple fact that she was his God-child.

So that his heart was sore as he led the way to lunch, remembering the bright-eyed girl of the old happy days.

"There you are, Derry! Will you sit here, my dear?" He drew out her chair for her with old-fashioned courtesy. "And the child (I forget his name) he'd better have a cushion." He nodded to the footman who solemnly arranged it.

"That all right? And now I hope you've got thundering appetites." He took his place in the great oak chair with its high carved back.

"And what have you been up to?" he smiled at his small guest who sat beside Kilmarny with a bright, excited face.

"We've been all over the stables," the Bosun raised his dark eyes, full of pleasure, in response.

"And he's chosen his mount," said Kilmarny, with a wink at the old man. "He thinks that chestnut hunter of yours about up to his weight."

Sir Hugo laughed heartily.

"He's got a good eye for a horse. D'you ride,

sonnie? But I'm sure you do, from the very look of you."

The Bosun's cheeks were red. He admitted the soft impeachment, with a sidelong glance at Derry, his new delightful friend.

"I've got a pony," he said, "and I knock about the lanes—but Skipper won't let me hunt yet, although I'm learning to jump. My pony's name is Crab, 'cos, when he gets excited, he likes to go sideways." He giggled joyously.

"Well, that's better than backwards," Sir Hugo smiled at April. "What's the little lad's name? I don't think you told me."

"Eric," began April, but Kilmarny broke in.

"Why, there's only a 'D' between us. I'm 'Derrick' you know."

"And, by Jove! he's got your white lock." Sir Hugo was suddenly struck with the odd coincidence.

"Come to think of it, the boy's not unlike you. He reminds me of a picture your Grandfather used to have. D'you remember the one I mean?—as a child in riding-breeches."

"His other name is Clifton," April interposed. "His mother married again, you see. She's a Mrs. Newcomen. They're near neighbours of mine, I'm glad to say."

A curious look passed over Kilmarny's face. He reached for the decanter and filled up his glass. The wine ran over, leaving a red stain on the cloth and he bit his lip as he caught Sir Hugo's mischievous eyes.

"That's a bad sign, Derry." He had seen the hand shake. "You're getting nerves, my boy, or taking to the bottle!"

"It's that confounded mare of yours," Kilmarny found his voice, "she nearly pulled my arms off on her way home this morning. By the way, I hear there's cubbing on Wednesday at six o'clock, at Four Elms bridge—wherever that may be?"

"Why—it's quite close to Coddell." The Bosun was excited. "Oh, are they really coming hunting our way?"

"Seems so, you'd better get up and see." Kilmarny eyed the boy.

Something wistful in the glance caught April's attention and she remembered suddenly she had heard that the fine old place he owned still lacked an heir.

Little she guessed the tragedy that lay underneath, to which today's lunch had added a fresh act; as Kilmarny talked on recklessly in his soft Irish voice conscious that he sat by the side of his own child.

Candida's son and his! A pain gripped him hard. The boy he never could own, the heir he coveted.

And a memory of the mother, sacrificed for ambition, swept across him with pitiless insistence.

Meanwhile the meal had come to a close and coffee was served on the terrace.

The little boy refused it and went off with Kilmarny, who guessed that the other pair would like to continue their talk.

"That's a nice child," said the old man thought-

fully. "Derry seems quite wrapped up in him—pity he hasn't a son. . . ."

Then he turned back to the subject nearest his heart.

"Well now, my dear, about yourself. I hope you've been thinking it out. How soon can you be off?"

"Oh, Uncle Hugo!" She temporised, stirring her coffee slowly. "You're going a little fast. I took the place for six months at least and I've only been there three! I can't disappear without some sort of excuse."

"The fact is, you don't want to go?"

He looked at her shrewdly but she avoided his gaze, apparently absorbed in the wide view before her.

"I don't wish to be inquisitive," he went on steadily, "but I fail to see the charm of being buried alive—and alone!—in a God-forsaken place like Coddell-in-the-dale. Of course you were ill when you came there and wanted a quiet rest. But now . . ." his eyes shewed frank admiration. "You look like a girl again—'fit' isn't the word! Don't you think," he watched her closely, "it's about time you emerged from that rather dismal 'rest cure'?"

April frowned; at a loss what to reply. It came as a surprise to her, the force of her reluctance. Only a few weeks since she had been wondering too if this solitude were the best thing for her, acutely aware of the loneliness of the old house in the woods.

What had caused this undoubted change in her outlook? Why should she feel the sting of parting from

a place that had held but the passing charm of a need for solitude?

"I don't know why it is," she spoke her thoughts aloud, "but I simply hate to go. I've grown to love the place."

"Well, you'd grow to love the next," Sir Hugo suggested comfortably, "unless, of course, there's any further inducement?" He gave a little start as he saw that his words went home and a faint colour crept up under her clear skin.

"It can't be Majendie," he said to himself, "she can see the boy in town."

"There's Mrs. Newcomen. . . ." But she spoke to gain time, to recover her lost ground in the shock of enlightenment.

For in a flash she knew what had altered her point of view. Her honest mind ran back to a certain definite date that marked the first of many a morning walk.

Half-angry with herself, half-amazed at the notion, she realised that the secret lay with Lorimer Van Someren.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE BOSUN had a secret. He hugged it tight, mistrusting speech, in a silence that at any other time might have made April wonder. But now as they drove homeward through the sunny afternoon, her own mind was too full of perplexity to feel more than thankful for the child's preoccupation.

For her thoughts moved in a circle around Van Someren. The fact of her newly-discovered interest in the man was the very spur needed to hasten her departure.

Facing the danger in her own determined way she realised she was learning to lean on his strength, to turn to him in moments of weariness and doubt and to connect him subtly with her everyday existence.

That danger lay in an intimacy so strictly one of friendship, so unlike all others in her busy social life, had never so much as occurred to April's mind. Unconsciously she had built a house of cards, taking infinite pleasure as it rose higher and higher under her slim hands.

Now, with a shrewd blow, Sir Hugo had dislodged it, bringing her back to realities and a world of men and women.

The knowledge that he was right, that the perilous game must end, she did not really question, sad though it left her.

Oddly enough what her God-father guessed but kept discreetly hidden, that "further inducement" to the beauty of the Landslide was the one factor needed to clinch his argument.

For she could not place Van Someren on the same plane as Majendie; she knew the former to be too masterful for that. Despite his admiration, his steady care for her, on matters he deemed important she could not bias his views.

The truth was he influenced her more than she influenced him in those long morning walks that had grown a daily habit. Thoughtful and attentive, deferential to her desires, he never stooped to flatter, nor lowered his standard to win a smile from her.

And although it gave her a sense of safety in his hands, a curious feeling of rest, sheltered from the storm and stress of life, she saw that a hidden peril endangered her personality—that she might become absorbed in the strength of another.

Long since she had determined she would never marry again. Although divorce had ended the strain of her married life she did not admit to herself that she was morally free.

Widowhood alone could set her on that plane and here her bitter experience forbade a further venture. Therefore she saw distinctly she must never allow herself to step across the borderline of friendship with a man. But she had drifted so gradually into this intimacy that she found, to her dismay, it was not easy to break. Never perhaps had Van Someren held so

strong an appeal as in the hour she decided that safety lay in flight.

And as if Fate guessed this and laughed within her sleeve the American stood on her doorstep as she drove up to the house.

"Hello!—there you are." He helped her down from the cart. "I've come on a begging errand from Sister and myself. They told me indoors you would be home to tea, so I waited on the chance in my usual dogged way. Hope you don't mind?"

He smiled down at her, but she avoided his eyes, feeling a guilty stab at the sight of his happy face.

"Of course not. I'm very glad to see you." She led the way into the cool paved hall.

The quaint beauty of the place gripped her heart anew and she felt for a moment an insane desire to cry.

"We'll have tea here, I think. It's so hot outside." Regretfully she gazed round the dim panelled walls. It breathed of home to her, with its books and flowering plants and away through the window the far-off purple hills.

"You look tired." Van Someren's voice was grave. He felt instinctively there was something amiss, as he pulled forward a chair and hunted round for a cushion in the thoughtful way to which she had grown serenely accustomed.

"I think perhaps I'd better be off—you've had a long drive?"

He stood in front of her trying to read her mind.

"No. Don't go." Her voice was abrupt. "It's

simply . . . that I'm longing for my tea." She pulled herself together and smiled back at him. "Please sit down—and don't look so restless! I want to hear what Sister's message is."

He obeyed her quietly without further comment.

"To tell you the truth"—he stooped to push a foot-stool nearer to her feet—"I feel rather shy about it altogether. She's set her heart, it seems, on giving me a Birthday—despite the fact that I've outgrown velvet suits! It's a sort of bully treat to make me feel young and she doesn't think it complete unless you join in."

He gave a little laugh and added: "She's right there. So do say you will? And set my mind at ease."

"But first of all I must know what the treat's going to be? I can't promise anything in this reckless fashion."

Lottie brought in the tea and arranged it before her, followed by the black cat, who sidled up to Van Someren, rubbing her sleek head against his outstretched hand. "If you please, mum, the gardener's sent in radishes. He says they'll be getting too big and he thought he'd better pull them."

The little maid placed the dish with its red roots invitingly in the middle of the table as she glanced across for her mistress' approval.

"Quite right, Lottie; they do look nice." April smiled sadly, knowing the end was drawing near; this simple homely life that had proved so short and sweet.

And suddenly with the thought her mood veered round. A spirit of revolt tempted her to snatch the few remaining hours as yet vouchsafed to her.

She turned to Van Someren, her eyes bright and hard.

"I've changed my mind," she laughed. "I'm going to be so rash! I promise to come to the Birthday treat—even if it includes swing-boats!"

"Now that's real nice," the American's face lit up. "Sister'll be fairly tickled to death when I tell her what you say. And as for me"—he looked so young, so boyishly delighted that April's hand shook as she passed him his tea. "Why, I feel like a clam at high tide!"

She had to laugh at this, as he went on impetuously developing the scheme.

"It's all mapped out. We're going up to town. By the two o'clock train tomorrow, if that suits you? We're taking rooms for the night at the Great Central Hotel—it's handy for the station and not a bad place. Well, then we'll do a dinner—the best we can find—and go to the theatre and on to the Savoy—and we don't return to Coddell until the Monday morning."

"Sunday, I suppose, is given up to rest—the necessary rest after the Birthday treat?"

She felt a little staggered at the magnitude of the affair, realising too late she had promised her support.

"Not it! To my mind it's the nicest part. I've chartered a little launch, an electric launch, at Staines, and we're going to spend the whole day lazing on the

River. Sister chose Staines on account of Magna Charta."

At this typical touch April's mirth—never so near at hand as when it bordered tears—riotously turned the scales in favour of laughter.

"Why on earth . . . Magna Charta?" She got it out at last.

"Well, you see, in America we think a lot of that—it's a side-light from history on national character. You're surely proud of it?" He gave her a puzzled glance but found it hard to resist the infection of her mood.

"Do have a radish and tell me all about it." Her blue eyes danced with amusement as she confessed herself. "I've left my education such a long way behind that I can't connect the event in any way with Staines."

"You don't say!" he stared at her, "why, it was signed there—or at least thereabouts at a spot called Runnymede. It must have been a slap-up blow for the King—the first dawn in Britain of the democratic spirit. . . ."

"Well that's one way of looking at it," April conceded and went on hastily, seeing that argument might follow, "it's on the way to Windsor—I think I remember now."

"And that's another reason. Sister's very keen at seeing the Castle from the water. We've got a print at home that she thinks real cunning, with the trees and the Round Tower and a lot of flags flying. We thought when we got to Datchet we'd try and find

your cousin and take him along with us if he cares to come. He told me he's generally there for a day or two week-ends."

His keen grey eyes watched her and under their veiled appeal April answered impulsively the unspoken question in them.

"Why, that would be splendid—a young 'beau' for Sister."

And then quite suddenly she flushed rosy-red, realising too late the obvious inference.

Into Van Someren's face came a sudden glad light. He opened his mouth to speak, then quickly checked himself.

April made an elaborate business of filling up the tea-pot, but the man was not unconscious of her inward discomfiture.

"Sure." The simple word somehow balanced matters. "I like Majendie," he said, "he's gotten a sense of humour."

"He's a dear boy," she gave a sigh of relief. "I've known him, you see, ever since he was a child."

"That so?" Van Someren rose to his feet. He felt he must be gone. He could not trust himself. That little slip of hers, pairing the two together, had sent the blood rioting to his heart. He could have caught her up in those strong arms of his, never again to let her go far from their reach.

"Well, I must hustle along and give Sister your answer. I've got to wire to town and fix things up."

"Wait a minute!—tell me again, what time is the

train? And I've never yet thanked you for asking me to come."

"Two o'clock, at the Junction. And, as to any thanks—well, we hardly dared hope that you'd be so vurry kind."

"Why shouldn't I come and fetch you both in the cart?" The thought struck her as they were shaking hands. "That's what I'll do. You'll be ready? About half past one?"

"You can bet your life on that!"

He smiled down at her. Regretfully he let her fingers go, and turned away from the old stone porch.

She watched him for a moment striding down the drive.

"And many happy returns of tomorrow!" She called after him.

Van Someren turned, bare-headed, for a last look at her. His eyes shone like stars and he held his head high. Again she was caught by the sense of the man's power; the happy, thoughtful atmosphere in which he seemed to live.

"He's a dear!" she said to herself. "I really don't know how . . ." She left the sentence unfinished with a quick-drawn sigh.

"So long!" Van Someren cried, and turned out of sight, and then to himself he echoed her parting speech.

"Happy returns of tomorrow?" He cut down a nettle with his stick as he went. "Well—if she's part of it . . ."

And he smiled at the far-off hills.

CHAPTER XIX

RUNNYMEDE, a damp meadow inhabited by cows, fell somewhat short of Sister's ardent hopes.

"Not even an 'hôtel'!" Her voice breathed disgust as she looked across the buttercup-studded waste.

Still it was something to have eaten mayonnaise on a site made famous by the first great strike. The phrase, "a blow for independence," sounded more resonant after a glass of champagne, and their gaiety was further enhanced by the ironical cheers of a passing "joy-boat", a densely-packed Thames steamer, with its mixed cargo of men and women and babies, concertinas, and beer.

"Well—I'm happy." Van Someren stretched himself luxuriously on the grass, as April smiled down at him from under a Japanese sunshade that added a note of colour, Eastern and bizarre, to the soft batiste frock she wore in honour of the occasion.

The American girl glanced at her with an approving eye. Long ago she realised the costliness of April's "simplicity".

"It's stunning, that get-up! Paris, I guess?"

April nodded her head gaily.

"And quite new," she said, "out of compliment to your brother's birthday-treat."

She smoothed down the embroidered folds with the satisfaction every woman feels at another woman's praise.

Her wide black hat, in a coarsely plaited straw, was garlanded with a wreath of tiny flowers, and under it her hair gleamed fitfully like copper that gains an added glamour when shadows fall across it.

A ray of sunshine, piercing the hedgerow behind them, played with her diamond-studded watch, that swung, as ever, on a chain around her neck.

"Do let me see . . ." Miss Van Someren's little hand stole toward the coveted object.

"Why—it's nearly three o'clock!" She turned it over idly, admiring the delicate setting of the stones.

At the back a disk of enamel, deep blue, and inset with brilliants in the form of initials, was surmounted by a graceful coronet.

"P . . . G . . . E." The girl read it out. "Say, that's cunning! A legacy, perhaps?" She raised her eyes curiously to April's face.

The latter looked down with a start of annoyance.

"The watch? Yes—it was—left to me."

She drew a breath of relief as she saw her explanation accepted without demur.

But Van Someren was watching with his keen grey eyes, and again he glanced moodily at her bare left hand, searching for the ring that still puzzled him with its curious history of which he held a part.

Would he ever, he wondered, be cognisant of the whole? And what would then result—laughter or tears?

He pondered upon it, brows knit together, until his sister's voice roused him from his dreams.

"We . . . ll, you don't *look* happy, whatever you may feel. Cheer, Lorry! You're only a year older."

Van Someren sat up, clasping his hands round his knees, and faced the pair of pretty women.

"How could a man be anything else?" He waved his hand toward them. "Of course I am—as happy as the optimistic frog! Did you ever hear the story of that famous veteran?"

He spoke to Mrs. Panhasard, but his sister answered for her.

"Oh, do tell it, Lorry." She slipped a little hand through April's arm. "You'd just love it, if you haven't heard it before."

"Please," said April persuasively.

Van Someren, nothing loth, responded to the call.

"It's an old yarn, I must tell you, that crops up every year at one of our Yale dinners. We don't think the evening is quite complete without it. You sure you don't know it?"

"Sure." April smiled.

"Well," Van Someren proceeded: "Once upon a time, two frogs went prospecting in a dairy. They happened upon some milk in a pan, and, trying to drink it, both fell in. The sides were high and slippery and there seemed no way out. Now, one of them was an optimist and the other a pessimist, and, as they swam round and round, they started to air their views.

"Said the pessimist: 'Reckon this is a fierce busi-

ness. We've got to drown some time, so what's the use of struggling? It's just Fate, and that's all there is to it.' So he threw his head down and his feet up, and went under—glop . . . glop . . . glop! A few bubbles and he was dead.

"But the optimist, still swimming round, figured it out otherwise. 'It's up to me to try,' he said, 'and, while there's life, there's hope! And, if I can't make good, I'll still have the fun of putting up a fight.'

"So on he went, paddling around and thinking very hard, when suddenly he hit something solid with his foot. There was a pat of butter as big as a shirt button!

"'Hello,' said he, 'here's hoping!' and started in earnest, churning up the milk and watching the curds gather. At last the island was so big he gave a little spring—'Hop'—he was on it—'hop'—he was off and over the rim of the pan. 'Hop' for the dairy door, and there he was, free again."

"It's a fine moral, isn't it?" Van Someren joined in the laughter that his carefully told story had evoked.

"So you think it never does to admit a sense of failure?" Something in April's eyes made the man pause.

"I think it's sounder to hold on and take the fighting chance. There's sometimes a way out that nobody can see. But it wants courage, good and plenty"—his face was grave—"for there's nothing half so hard in life as just having to wait."

"That's quite true," April nodded her head. "And

it's particularly the handicap of my sex. Men have more often the chance of *making* 'things happen', whilst women have to wait at home and try to learn patience."

"They turn the scales sometimes," Van Someren suggested, "and *we* do the waiting whilst they make up their minds!"

His mouth was twisted into a whimsical smile, conscious he was learning a lesson of patience himself.

"We . . ll, - guess Mr. Majendie won't see us to-day." His sister stifled a yawn. She disliked serious discussions. It seemed to isolate her and bring the pair together, and as chaperon she decided to interfere.

"Come along, then"—April rose to her feet—"but you can't expect energy after a banquet like this! Still I think I can reach the launch and collapse in a basket chair—that is, if I make a real sturdy effort."

"Would you like to be carried?" Van Someren asked, with a laugh.

"Me first," said his sister lazily from the bank.

"Well, hold tight, Honey."

He stooped down, and, gathering up the dainty little figure, started to run with her across the stretch of meadow. "Oh—oh—oh!" cried Miss Van Someren in mock alarm. One arm clasped her brother's neck, and the other clutched at her skirts, whence two tiny feet and a generous display of silk-shod ankles emerged.

"Don't drop me, Lorry." She clung to his broad

shoulder. But he ran all the faster, exulting in his strength.

"Now will you be good?" He lowered her onto the launch that was moored against the bank in a stretch of deep water.

"Dear old brother." She pulled his face down to her, kissing him warmly on both his sun-burnt cheeks.

For they were very devoted, and not ashamed to shew it, each proud, in their way, of the other's personality.

April, following in their wake, watched the little scene with a sudden touch of envy, feeling the old loneliness rise up around her.

Something in her face enlightened the young girl, and she spoke impulsively her thought aloud.

"You'd like him for a brother, too?"

"Indeed I should," said April. But, as she met his gaze, to her keen mortification, she felt the colour rise under her clear skin.

Van Someren held out his hand to help her down on the launch, as his sister slipped away to give an order in the cabin.

"I'd sooner," his eyes shone, "you'd choose her for a sister."

The moment the words were out he would have recalled them, as he saw that April gathered their full significance.

But once again she was mistress of herself. She looked straight past him at the meadows beyond.

"It comes to the same thing if I take you for my brother."

"Not quite," said Van Someren steadily.

"You're a little hard to please." She dared not meet his eyes.

"Perhaps"—his voice sank—"my ideals are too high."

"Up stream or down, Sir?" The engineer touched his cap. Van Someren consigned the man, well—not to Runnymede.

"Datchet," he said impatiently. The word, rasped out, sounded curiously like a mild imprecation.

It caught April's fancy, and she laughed aloud, thankful for the relief of the unlooked-for interruption.

"I must go and help . . . 'Sister,' to pack the plates!" She turned and fled, avoiding Van Someren's helpful hand, and down the little ladder that led to the cabin.

But, before the narrow doorway swallowed her from sight, he caught one swift glance upward where he stood watching her.

In it he read fear, indecision, and something else that turned the river beside him into a blaze of gold: that made the blue sky bluer and the green English fields into a garden fair with the presence of hope.

The launch glided on between the low banks, and still Van Someren stood there, staring into space.

Below in the little cabin the two women talked as they packed away the litter of plates that the engineer had washed.

Their conversation, skillfully upheld by April, had turned on the inexhaustible topic of Paris shops.

She was not sorry to stay there and collect her startled thoughts, as they passed through the lock with its bright border of flowers and on round the islands to the smooth reach beyond. And at last Van Someren hailed them from above.

"Come up and see the Castle! You're missing everything," for Windsor, grey and massive, rose upon its hill.

"Why, it's vurry like the picture." Miss Van Someren was pleased. "There's the Round Tower with its flag!" She grew quite excited. "I like it even better than the *real* Tower of London—or the Abbey, or any other of your show sights. And, as for Buckingham Palace, it makes me feel mean. Why, it's not half as imposing as our own Customs House!"

"Here we are at Datchet." April pointed out the irregular low houses lining the right bank, "and there's the landing-stage." The launch slowed down. "But I haven't the faintest idea where Boris is to be found. We shall have to make inquiries somewhere in the town."

"Call it a town?" Van Someren smiled. "We'll throw out a search party and trust we don't get lost."

They landed and walked along the narrow main street, full of Sunday couples and children in their best, stray dogs and bicycles, and an occasional shuttered shop.

"Here's an Inn," said Van Someren, as they crossed the railway line. "I think I'll make tracks for the local barkeeper. He'll know, sure, where Majendie

is hiding." In a minute or two he rejoined them, radiant with news.

"It's up the road and round to the left and on by the Church—the third cottage on the right, and it's called"—he laughed—"The Nook.' There, now, aren't you proud of your little brother?" He tucked a hand in his sister's arm, and they started off again.

Following his directions, they skirted the Church-yard, passed through a gate, and into a narrow lane. The place looked damp and lonely in the shadow of the yews that peered like hired mourners over the crumbling wall.

A curious feeling of discomfort invaded April's mind, the gloomy place so different from what she had imagined.

"I hope he'll be glad to see us," she said to herself, as they passed the first cottage, that was labelled "Ivy Bank".

Next came "The Hollies", to let, dilapidated.

Then, with an air somewhat gayer than the others, enhanced by lace curtains that veiled its four windows, a bungalow, with "The Nook" painted above the gate.

"Here we are!" The American lifted the latch. "Shall I ring?" He found the bell, as they paused in front of a green door at the end of the strip of garden.

"I believe you've broken it," Miss Van Someren whispered, as the sound pealed out in the closed-in, quiet lane.

A pause of expectancy; but no one appeared. "Oh,

here's a knocker, too." He gave a sharp tat-tat, and they all stood there, waiting patiently.

The door opened at that, half-way, and a girl looked out.

She seemed to be bewildered at finding strangers there, and, for a moment, she stared at them in silence, a picturesque figure in the shadow of the porch.

For she wore a kimono of soft lilac silk, drawn round her slender form, betraying carelessly a neat foot in a high-heeled shoe and a lace petticoat.

Her hair, fair and shining, was waved high above her round, childish face, and brought down in little clusters of curls that hid her ears and the hand that held the door was carefully manicured, and—albeit the left—innocent of rings.

"What d'you want?" She tossed her head, as she spoke, with a slightly aggressive glance at the astonished trio.

"I'm afraid we've made a mistake," the American answered courteously, "we were told a Mr. Majendie was living here."

"Well, so he is. But I don't think you can see him." She drew the door still closer, and gave a swift glance backward, as a man's step echoed noisily through the house. "I think he's gone out."

She waited a second, then threw the door wide open, drawing with one hand her kimono about her.

"If you'll come inside," she said, "I'll go and look for him."

Van Someren glanced at April, who nodded her

head. She could not find her voice for the shame that possessed her.

For the girl in the kimono was indeed no stranger. There was not a shadow of doubt. It was "Chloe" of the Tea-shop.

Afterward she wondered why she had entered the house, but at the time the shock so bewildered her that she followed the girl obediently into the sitting-room, Van Someren and his sister bringing up the rear.

The situation was acute with discomfort, as they stood there in a silence that no one cared to break.

April's eyes wandered round the somewhat untidy room that was still wreathed in fresh cigarette smoke.

On the table beside her a work-basket lay, filled to the brim with a heap of unmended socks, and down by the fire-place a pair of soft slippers suggested that the owner had just changed into boots.

The mantel-piece was littered with unframed photographs of women and of men, singly and in groups. Here a Cricket Eleven leaned up against an actress, signed in scrawling letters, "your devoted Kitty". There a large portrait of Chloe herself—the cheap inspiration of a Brighton post-card "artist".

Something about the whole room made April's blood creep—the faint odour of scent, the stale smell of cigars. A pile of torn music lay upon the piano that was draped clumsily with a faded strip of cretonne.

It had the appearance of a house let year by year, growing each season shabbier, more stained, and more

sordid; with that curious air of non-respectability that cannot be defined but lurks in dark corners.

"I'm afraid he's not in." Van Someren spoke at last. His foot tapping the floor betrayed his nervous tension.

But, as he spoke, the door opened and Chloe reappeared, her face rather white, her bright eyes vindictive.

"He's gone out," she said. "I expect he's on the river."

She held the door wide and they took the hint with alacrity.

"Will you leave your name?" She scrutinised April and then turned her glance on Miss Van Someren.

Curiosity was stamped on her pretty, moody face, a faint envy that bordered on insolence.

"No, thanks." Van Someren's voice, still courteous, was deadly cold. "I think we'd better write." He gave a sigh of relief as he saw his women-folk pass out before him into the road.

"Good-day." He raised his hat and the front door closed.

Once outside the house he saw his way clear. The whole thing must be treated on a common-place footing. The fact of Majendie's cousinship and a certain sense of pity—the indulgent attitude of one man to another—drove him to hush up the somewhat obvious scandal.

"Bad luck," he said cheerfully, "on poor old Boris! On the very day of all when he'd gotten down guests."

That was a pretty girl in that mauve kimono. I'd like to have seen the rest of the party! He'll sure get cold feet when he learns we've been here and run across some of his . . . theatrical friends."

He slipped one hand through his sister's arm, walking between the pair; and then, without apology, the other through April's, as they marched up the deserted, shady lane.

The simple way he did it seemed to call for no excuse, and—as he intended—broke the tension of her mood.

"And now, children," he went on, in his happy, boyish voice, "what about tea? I think we'd better be content to have it on the launch. These little river 'ôtels don't look up to much! Personally, I think Datchet's about played out—unless it is the Sabbath that's cast a blight on it."

Miss Van Someren laughed merrily. Her brother's words had lightened a certain uneasy doubt that, notwithstanding the freedom that her own country permitted—that casual, unchaperoned attitude toward mixed comradeship—had made her feel uneasy in Majendie's establishment.

"Pity we missed him"—she took his cue cleverly—"perhaps he's gone out wasp-hunting again! And, as to tea, I vote for the launch, don't you?"

She turned her smiling face towards Mrs. Panhasard.

"Far nicer," said April, as they came out on the road and the American's hand slipped away from her arm.

She gave him a shy glance, full of gratitude, divining the chivalry of his excuses for Majendie. She dared not pause to probe into her own heart, but shut the door resolutely on her sick disgust. Nevertheless the shadow of it dimmed the afternoon, with its hint of treachery, its sordid background of life.

She felt in an odd way soiled by the man's proximity—those wistful eyes that said so much, the lips that had touched her hands.

And, all the while, as he laid his boy's love at her feet . . . She could not finish the phrase, but gave a little shudder, as the face of Chloe rose up, with its insolent, childish smile.

Nevertheless, against this dark bewilderment, as a ray of light is heightened by a bank of heavy clouds, so Van Someren's character shone forth clear.

Clean and strong and loyal, he called to her respect. And another link between them was forged out of pain.

CHAPTER XX

THE mists of early morning hung over the countryside as Sir Derrick Kilmarny rode forth from the gate of Sleyd Hall.

The air, chill and moist, suggested that Autumn had laid one daring foot across the boundary-line of Summer and the leaves fluttered down obedient to her step on the grass burnt yellow by the fierce August sun.

So dreary indeed had been his first glimpse of the day that, when his man called him, Derry was half inclined to turn over again. But the memory of his promise to meet the little boy stirred him into a sudden wakefulness.

For he had planned to take the Bosun for his first day's cubbing, an adventure made more thrilling to the child by the fact of its secrecy.

No one was to know! He could saddle his own pony and be there at the rendezvous by half-past five o'clock. To this Kilmarny had agreed with all the more readiness from the fact that, had the Newcomens known, complications might have ensued.

In his easy-going way he never paused to reflect that he was leading the child into possible mischief.

The Bosun's sporting proclivities were after his own heart. He promised himself some happy hours in

his son's company. Now, as he jogged along, saving his horse for the work ahead, his thoughts turned to Candida and the one romance of his life.

Intrigues there were innumerable blurring the backward vista but this, the nearest approach to love that the man had ever known, stood out clear and golden through the empty, selfish years. It seemed to him now, in the grey light, down the long, lonely road, the one good gift offered him that he had wantonly spurned.

Candida—— How the name brought back the sweetness of those days, the laughing face with its sunny curls, the blue and trustful eyes.

Grudgingly he compared her to his wife at Marienbad and wondered, not for the first time, at the folly of his marriage. For Julian Dirke's widow had proved but poor comfort—the shadow of the woman he had wooed as Dirke's wife.

Childless, petulant, cold, ever seeking excitement, she wearied him with her jealous love, her sullen fits of spleen.

Even that ambition that had prompted him to the step, the political influence that she undoubtedly held, had been undermined by her faults of character.

For, as the years passed on and her beauty faded swiftly, her sharp tongue undid what Dirke's fame had achieved and her large group of friends gradually scattered, leaving her but the empty prestige of the past. The fall of that Government mainly upheld by Dirke had forced his disciple slowly into the background.

For a time his eloquence, more facile than inspired, had made him a marked man on the Opposition benches.

But he had tired of a life that waxed monotonous, as the Liberals settled down to their long term of office.

Little by little he let the reins slide, urged thereto by the natural indolence that strengthened with middle age.

Then for a year he vanished on a distant sporting tour, glad to escape the tedious days beside his nagging wife.

For his character lacked stability, his ambitions were short-lived. The "easiest course" was the motto he nailed up for the forties.

Still handsome, though a little inclined to superfluous flesh, he flirted in surface fashion with any pretty woman. Men voted him good company and he went the social round in a circle where luxury had itself become a burden.

But under it all, at times, he felt the lonely blank, the fierce need of an aim in life and a woman's sympathy. He dared not think of the future, of a barren old age . . . conscious that he was the last of his line—that the blame was mainly his.

So as he rode along through the Bartons' neighbouring park, where the high bracken served as a lair for the timid deer, and pale shafts of sunshine fell athwart the trees, his face was set in a dreary mask that was not unlike despair.

For the thought of the child with his gipsy face

waiting beyond the hill, with eager eyes watching for the father he could not own, drove home a lesson he had learned to overlook: that "Might-have-been," the saddest of men's secret Hells on Earth.

As he came to the last gate he heard a sound of hoofs, striking noisily on the hard lime-stone road, and looking over his shoulder descried another rider, bound for the same destination as himself.

Sir Derrick paused with his riding-crop on the top-most bar, grateful for the knowledge of another man's presence, and as the stranger passed through and thanked him for his civility, he gave a little start of pleased recognition.

"Why—you're Dr. Sartoris, surely?"

He looked at the well-knit figure riding a big bay horse, and went on with a warmth he could hardly have explained.

"You've forgotten me I expect, but I've not forgotten you. I was once a patient of yours!" and he laughed pleasantly.

The stranger's face lit up. He had the keen and quietly powerful look of the London specialist, tempered by a certain hearty charm that earned for him affection as well as respect.

"I do remember you, but I can't recall your name," he paused thoughtfully, his thick brows, that overhung the blue-grey eyes, brought sharply together.

"Now let me see—it must be a good many years ago. You came to me with a slight trouble in the throat?"

"That's it. I'm Kilmarny. Sir Derrick Kilmarny. I had tonsilitis—pretty badly too—and you got me right in time for an electioneering speech—an important one it was, and I was in a hole. One doesn't easily forget a good office like that."

"Of course!" Sartoris looked at him as they rode side by side. "I always remember a face but I'm not good at names. You're on your way, I hope, to the meet at Four Elms Bridge?"

"I am—if I don't miss the road."

"Well, I can be your guide if that's what you want. I'm staying with the Bartons and I know the country well. My host's given up riding since a fall when he lost his nerve, but he always keeps a good mount or two for his friends."

"I suppose you're taking a holiday," Kilmarny suggested. Something vigorous and keen in the other's personality dispelled those phantom miseries that had dogged his lonely path.

"Just for a week-end—too busy for more. But there's nothing like a day with the hounds to blow away the cobwebs."

They passed out of the lodge gates and on to the dusty road.

"The country wants rain badly, the ground's as hard as a stone. But the heavy dew last night looks like the drought lasting."

So, on trivial topics, they chatted fitfully until they came to the steep hill below the Foxton Woods.

"It's just over the brow," Sartoris explained, "beyond that grey house you can see among the trees."

"Who lives there?" Derry asked as they started the ascent.

"One of my own fraternity, I understand. He keeps a Private Home—slight mental cases and dipsomaniacs. It's a dreary-looking place, with those high stone walls."

"Not easy to get out," Kilmarny hazarded. "I thought it was a convent when I passed the other day. By the way, d'you know some people called Newcomen? They live in the dale at a village called Coddell."

Sartoris shook his head. "I can't say I do."

"There's a child who rides," Kilmarny went on. "I promised to meet him at the cross-roads this morning. His first day's cubbing—he's a sporting little chap."

"A red-letter day for him!" The specialist smiled. "I can still recall my early enthusiasm; though it's a good long way behind me now!"

They reached the brow of the hill, passing high iron gates that added a sinister suggestion of prison to the house.

"And there he is!" A note of excitement rang in Kilmarny's voice as in the far distance he saw a little figure, patiently awaiting them on a fat grey pony.

The Bosun waved his cap, frantic with delight. His shrill greeting reached them as they trotted down the hill.

"I saddled Crab myself," he cried as he cantered towards them, "and I've been here since five o'clock, to make sure of you."

They pulled up by the side of the road and Kilmarny jumped off and threw the reins to Sartoris, who smiled indulgently at the happy, excited child.

"Down you come, Bosun, I want to see to your girths." For his quick eye noted that the saddle had slipped.

"Look out—he's sure to kick!" The small boy warned him as Derry tightened the straps under Crab's round form.

"They're all asleep at home," the Bosun's dark eyes were dancing in his head, "*nobody* knows! I heard Susan snoring. But I didn't dare draw the bolts of the front door. I got out at last, through the pantry window. Oh, isn't it just a galumptious day?"

He sniffed up the misty air, standing there erect, every muscle a-quiver in his little body.

"Now then—up you go!" He was seated in the saddle—— "Your stirrups are too long—isn't that better?"

Derry looked up into the bright young face, one hand on the lad's knee, feeling a curious tenderness that held a hint of pain.

Sartoris, watching the pair, with eyes that had learned to take in humanity at a glance, was struck by the curious likeness existing between them, and a certain wistful longing in the man's attitude.

"He loves that boy," he said to himself, and a faint inspiration came to him that closely touched the truth. But he thrust the thought aside, with a man's distaste for gossip, unconsciously drawn by the charm

of the child as he trotted along beside them, full of happy importance.

They turned to the right down a narrow curving lane, leaving the main road to Coddell behind. Two more horsemen passed them and away in the distance they could hear the steady throb of further trotting hoofs.

"There's a short cut," the Bosun said, "by Farmer Gales' field. I've often come here, you know, with Darling, blackberrying."

He rose in his stirrups, staring ahead.

"There it is. Hurrah!—the gate's wide open."

And he led the way across deep cart-ruts, dried hard by the sun, into a wide meadow where a flock of sheep were grazing. In the dip below, a farm-house nestled and beyond it a thread of water gleamed, spanned by a stone bridge white in the sunshine.

On the further side of this a crowd of riders stirred and little dots on the hill announced the advent of others.

"Four Elms Bridge," Sartoris explained—"I expect they'll draw that covert beyond the ploughed field."

"We must make for the gate over by the farm." The Bosun gave directions in his shrill boy's voice.

"Come up, Crab." He touched the grey pony with his whip, who scenting turf beneath his feet broke eagerly into a canter.

"You follow me." He grabbed at his cap that the uneven going threatened to dislodge, whilst the two men, with an amused glance at each other, tacitly accepted the child's leadership.

"Steady now—don't go so fast!" Derrick called after.

Through the still air came the crack of the huntsmen's whips and it acted as a spur to the Bosun's wild excitement.

"There they are!" he cried and raised his hunting-crop as a line of pink coats came slowly into view.

Kilmarny's horse pecked and recovered with an effort. He shouted anxiously to the boy ahead.

"Hold him in, can't you? It's full of rabbit-holes."

But Crab, infected with his rider's fearlessness, increased rather than slackened their headlong pace.

And in a moment the unseen peril caught them, as Derrick spurred his horse forward, one hand outstretched for the rein.

Down went the grey pony, with a sharp, ominous thud, that the close-cropped grass was powerless to soften. For the earth was like a hard crust baked in the sun that had blistered the countryside day after day.

The boy flew over his head like a stone out of a sling, and lay as he fell in a sickening, crumpled heap.

"My God!" The words were wrung from the depths of Kilmarny's soul as he flung himself off his horse and knelt beside the child.

"He's all right . . . he's only stunned . . ." he found himself crying wildly as he gathered up the little limp body in his arms.

For a moment the field and sky swam round before him. Then he heard Sartoris speak, with a stern new note of command.

"Don't move him—let me see."

Skilful, tender hands were passing over his burden, as Kilmarny waited in breathless suspense.

The child's head hung back, the face still warm with life, lips parted with the joy that had thrilled his little soul.

But Death was there too—the shade of eternal night. Gently the surgeon closed the dark eyes.

How long he knelt there Kilmarny never knew. Indistinctly he gathered the drift of the other's speech.

"Quite instantaneous . . . painless, thank God!—. . . the crowning mercy of a broken neck . . ."

Mechanically he rose to his feet and looked round for his horse, which stood there patiently, in that dumb sympathy that lies in scenes of tragedy between man and beast.

The sun poured down, vanquishing the mist, and far away there sounded the gay note of a horn.

Pitilessly the ringing hoofs clattered over the bridge, as the heedless crowd swept forward after the pink coats.

Many a man had Sartoris watched go to his death, in the old Hospital days, with an unmoved face. But never, he told himself, a scene as cruel as this, the snapping asunder of this bright young life.

He felt an odd lump rise in his throat as he watched the agony on Kilmarny's face.

"It's no good," he said huskily—"there's nothing to be done. And after all . . ." he looked down at the

still, small form—"he's gone . . . at the height of his joy—as we'd all like to go . . ."

He turned away abruptly, stooping to gather up the child's cap and whip, that lay, out-flung, beyond them, on the turf.

"I'll see to the pony—I'm afraid he's broken his leg. And get a cart or something from that farm over there."

Kilmarny, still in silence, mounted his horse.

"Give him to me." His voice, dull and strained, seemed to come from far away, loud in his ears. He bent down for his burden, holding out his arms.

"You'll do—the rest?" Sartoris nodded his head.

"The name's . . . Newcomen. Coddell-in-the-dale."

Suddenly he remembered he had no claim on the man and began a half-hearted apology.

"That's all right . . ." The specialist checked the intention. "Wish I could do more." He looked up at the pair.

Derrick bare-headed with that strange white lock, that the sunshine singled out in his dark and glossy hair. The child with the same mark that added the last touch to that resemblance Sartoris had caught.

"I was sure of it," he said under his breath. "God help the man—it's been a bitter blow."

Without another word Kilmarny turned away, the dead body of his son pressed against his heart.

On and on, through the green lanes that wound down to the vale, past the shining river with its reeded

flowery banks, on rode Derry, to Coddell-in-the-dale.

And beside him a phantom kept pace with his horse; remorselessly it hunted him through sunlight and through shade—the knowledge that had come too late to stay the curse.

For of all a man's sowing no harvest is so sure as the full reaped measure of irresponsibility.

Lightly he had lived, lightly he had loved . . .

So with their dead child in his arms he came to Candida.

CHAPTER XXI

"You must get the funeral over—the sooner the better."

The village doctor, as usual, spoke his mind. Newcomen watched him, a question on his face.

"You think then . . . ?" He could not voice his fear.

"I don't like it at all. It's this unnatural calm. If only she'd break down . . ."

He lingered in the porch as though reluctant to depart. "Send for me at any time—never mind the hour. And if she does cry don't attempt to check her."

He wrung Newcomen's hand in hearty sympathy.

"You're her husband," he added, "and understand her moods. It's one of those cases where a Doctor's powerless. Love, not medicine, is what she needs just now. It's a cruel business . . ." His eyes were dim as he got into the cart.

Newcomen closed the gate gently after him and walked back to the house with that furtive hushed step that seems such a curious tribute to the presence of death.

The blinds were down and no one stirred within; as though a hint of sound or light could filter through to the senses of the dead child above.

Never had the man felt so acutely his despair nor

realized the impotence that hedged him round. The depths of the gulf between him and his wife seemed fathomless, a pit no human hands could bridge.

And in his cruel pain remorse found a part.

Many and many a time had he wished the child away, had grudged him the measure of his mother's passionate love. But that Heaven should grant his prayer with a tragic suddenness that threatened the very reason of his best-beloved warred with his orthodox and narrow creed of life and sent him blindly stumbling out into the dark. For the first time for many years he found he could not pray. He had a dazed notion that God had cheated him. If the answer to prayer was to be man's undoing, religion was a mockery and faith itself a snare.

In his tired brain, where the busy thoughts ran on, an odd phrase drifted, gathered in his wanderings: the memory of a legend of far-away Provence, subtle as the lore of its ancient peasantry.

"God keep you from the wolf and from your heart's desire."

His "heart's desire" . . . He knew it was the truth.

The dusk deepened into night, a breathless close calm brooded over the garden and the silence of the house.

Once old Susan came out timidly, eyes rimmed with weeping and stood by his side, under the dark verandah.

"She won't let me in . . ." her shrunk lips quivered. "The door's locked against me . . . oh, my bonnie lamb!"

The tears poured afresh down the lined old face as Newcomen in sympathy laid a hand on her arm.

"It's no good, Susan, we must bide *her* time . . . We'll be there when she wants us, you and I."

Moved by the misery of the bent old form he stooped down and kissed this faithful servant and friend.

"Oh sir . . . thankye, sir." She struggled for expression. "It du be mighty sore to stand by and wait. Many a time I've taken her on these old knees of mine and she's laid her head against me and cried—the pretty lamb! But now she won't have a word with old Susan! She's there all alone and I can't hear nothing. I've listened and I've listened but there never come a sound—it's the silence as scares me, sir, it seems onnatural."

For Candida upstairs was guarding her dead. A fixed idea survived the hour of her shock.

Dimly she felt they plotted to take the child from her—all that remained of her earthly happiness.

Rigid she sat there beside the still form, watchful, alert, nursing her delusion. For, in truth, the blow had temporarily unhinged her and she hardly yet realised that the Bosun was dead.

All that pierced the haze of her stricken soul was a sense of conspiracy that hung in the air, the old knowledge that Newcomen had never cared for the boy, that Susan herself guessed the secret of his birth.

So by the side of the little wooden bed, she sat there, motionless, the sentinel of Death.

The first faint streak of dawn divided the sky, a knife thrust that gaped in the heart of the night.

Slowly the grey light filtered through the blind, where Newcomen sat, outside his wife's door.

He rose at last, on tip-toe, crossing to the window to draw aside the curtain with a sigh of relief. For when the Creator made night as well as day he added a new burden for humanity in pain.

A chill breath of air blew in the sailor's face and he took a deep breath of it before he returned and for the hundredth time in the long dark vigil placed his ear against the crack of the door.

He heard a faint sound, the rustle of a dress and, before he could draw back, a hand upon the key.

The door opened slowly and Candida looked out.

For a moment's silence they stood there face to face.

"What—do you want?" Her hand was at her throat in the old nervous gesture that brought back to the man another scene of pain in the dead years behind them.

What prompted his reply, the serene inspiration that led him by a swift, sure current to her help, Newcomen could never explain to himself.

For what he answered was in its bare simplicity.

"I want to see the child." And then he caught his breath.

A faint smile crept into the mother's face. She passed a bewildered hand across her brow as though she struggled to understand his words.

Then, with a natural gesture, she held out her hand.

"Come," she said and drew him into the darkened room.

The curtains pulled close shut out the hint of dawn, but on the washing-stand a night-light flickered.

Even then he saw with a pitiful comprehension that a book shaded the feeble flame from the eyes of the dead child.

So uncertain was its light he could hardly make out the still outline that lay in its narrow bed. All his hope centred on those hot, dry fingers that clung to the grasp of his own longing hand.

Suddenly the old fear swept across his wife.

She turned round, placing herself between him and the dead.

"You won't take him away?" her voice rose, shrill.

"No, no." With an effort, he answered quietly, "I give you my word of honour, dear."

The fear in her eyes faded out again.

Gently she drew away the intervening sheet and they stood there, side by side, gazing down on all that was left of that ardent little life that had filled the quiet house with the sound of a child's feet.

"May I?" Newcomen watched her face.

Stooping down he kissed the cold curved lips. And, as he did so, a sound broke from his wife, a faint, fluttering sob that caught at his heart-strings.

"Oh my darling—my darling . . ." His hands went out to her; the tears poured down, unheeded, over his face.

And at the sight of the strong man's grief the frozen deeps in Candida's soul shivered and broke apart.

"John," she cried—"you . . . you . . ." and then, wildly, "He's *dead!*—my little son—my baby . . ." and she was in his arms . . .

So out of the great void that hides the Eternal Will, a love shaped and quickened and flamed into life. From sin and sorrow, the parents, was understanding born—that human charity that touches the divine.

For the child that had divided them with his loving little hands joined them together in his tragic death and the last ripple of the stone flung in heedless youth quivered and sank away into the eternal calm.

CHAPTER XXII

VAN SOMEREN heard the sad news on his return that evening and his thoughts instinctively turned in the direction of the Landslide, divining the distress of the woman he loved.

After a hurried dinner he remounted his bicycle and despite his sister's protest that evening calls were not the custom in England, he wished her an impatient good-night and set out in quest of April.

Miss Van Someren watched him go, splashing up the lane; for a sudden torrent of rain had succeeded the long drought, turning the hard roads in the Dale into running streams of water that poured down from the hills to join the river below.

"Poor old Lorry!—it's a case, sure." She shaded her eyes with her hand—"Oh, I wish we'd never left New York!"

Then her courage re-asserted itself as she turned back into the house, remembering a fragment of disjointed talk at dinner.

For the company Van Someren served desired his speedy return. Trade flourished across the water and they needed his active brain, those powers of administration which he undoubtedly possessed, no longer useful in his present position. No one was more eager to agree with this change of plans than the little

American girl. The mere thought of New York and her many friends there brought with it a wave of longing for her home. But Van Someren was torn asunder between love and duty. For the first time in his life he realised a force before which ambition itself seemed to pale, and his face shewed the conflict as he reached the long drive with its dripping arch of trees and eerie shadows beneath.

He found April under the verandah, with Esau by her side. In her lap she held a letter that the post had brought that day, in the cramped old-fashioned writing of Sir Hugo Gervase.

She greeted her visitor quietly, without any shew of grief, but he felt instinctively that she knew of the Bosun's death.

He pulled his chair round facing hers, with the narrow table between them, studying her face for a moment thoughtfully.

Then very simply he explained his late appearance.
"I had to come. I felt so worried about you."

April nodded her head, divining his hidden thought.

"It's dreadful, isn't it? Poor Mrs. Newcomen—I can't bear to think of what she's going through. And he was such a darling . . ." Her voice shook on the word. He could see that she controlled herself with a painful effort.

"If it hadn't been for me—" she seemed to be thinking aloud—"it never could have happened—that's the awful part. I can't forgive myself for my share in the disaster. Oh! how I wish I'd never gone to Sleyd!"

"I don't quite catch on," Van Someren looked perplexed—"would you mind telling me why you blame yourself?"

"You don't know . . . ?" She gave him a quick startled glance; then started to supply him with the details he lacked, of her visit to Sir Hugo and the child's meeting with Derry.

"Now do you understand?" Her white, sad face shewed the despair she felt.

"Sure." His voice was pitiful. "But I think you're confusing the point. If anyone is to blame it's that man Kilmarny. He had no earthly right to take the boy out hunting—without his parents' leave—that's where the fault lies."

Then, as she answered nothing, he leaned forward towards her, and laid a sympathetic hand over hers, clasped tightly together on the edge of the table.

"Now, look here, Mrs. Panhasard . . ."

But at his touch she started, her nerves suddenly jarred. The colour rose to her face and vehemently she turned on him.

"I'm *not* Mrs. Panhasard!—don't call me by that name—I can't keep it up . . . this living a lie . . . I oughtn't to have come here . . . I see it all now"—

Her breathless jerky words startled the man, and, feeling her control slipping from her grasp, April rose to her feet, and fled into the house.

The thoughts went whirling through Van Someren's brain as he gathered the significance of her reckless speech.

Not "Mrs. Panhasard"!—what could she mean? Was he nearing the heart of the mystery at last?

Impetuously he followed her through the open window, where in the dim light he could see her stand, her back turned towards him, her head bowed in her hands. Her shoulders rose and fell with her sharp, stifled sobs and all Van Someren's love leaped up at sight of her tears.

He took a quick step forward and, before she could protest, she felt his strong arm around her, the deep voice in her ear.

"Oh, Honey, Honey—*don't* cry so! I'm not going to let you break your heart like this. I don't care a damn who—or what—you are!—You're the woman I love, and that's enough for me!"

Gently he turned her towards him so that the twilight from without fell on her face, disfigured with tears. He did not attempt to kiss her but stood there still, one arm around her shoulders, waiting patiently.

And in her weakness it seemed to April as if the actual strength of the tall powerful figure soothed her tired nerves. She felt a strong temptation to cry aloud the fact, to admit herself conquered, and reap consolation.

Then the nobler side of her nature stirred to life, remembering the barrier that her conscience recognised.

She freed herself gently, mastering her tears.

"Please . . . please . . ." she whispered. He moved away from her.

"Very well." A note of chagrin sounded in his

voice. "It shall be as you wish—I think you know that. But if you *would* confide in me . . . would tell me the truth . . ."

She raised her head at this and met his pleading eyes.

"You shall know . . . everything—it's only fair to you," and went on despairingly, avoiding his gaze.

"I don't know what you'll say—I don't know what you'll think . . . but I'm not free even if . . . I cared."

He came closer at her speech, with a startled look on his face.

"Not free!" His worst fears were being realised. "You mean—your husband's living?"

"Yes." She whispered the word. It seemed to her suddenly a wall of strong defence against the promptings of her own mutinous heart.

But as she realised the pain in his grey eyes, and the knowledge grew with it how dear indeed he was, she went on hurriedly, destroying her only guard.

"I . . . divorced him—in May."

"Divorced him!" Van Someren almost shouted his relief. "That all?" He gave a short uncontrollable laugh. "Lord! how you frightened me, Honey," he said.

"But you don't understand—" She sank down on the sofa, with a sudden physical need for support, foreseeing the fight that was bound to ensue.

"I shouldn't ever dream of marrying again—not whilst . . . he lived. I shouldn't think it . . . right."

"Will you tell me the whole story?" His voice was quiet now but through it rang a thrill of triumph which he was powerless to suppress.

"I want to hear everything—if you feel up to it." He settled himself down to listen by her side.

So, in the deepening dusk, she laid her life bare, the early disillusion, the slow death of love. Then the long strain of the hopeless fight she waged, as drink claimed its victim, with a sure, insidious hold. The death of her child, her own broken nerve and the agony of doubt that still haunted her: the feeling she had "turned back from the plough," her life work undone, through physical lack of strength.

And as Van Someren listened his admiration grew; pity and anger swayed him and infinite relief, as step by step she justified his passionate faith in her.

"Oh, Honey, what a life!—the almighty grit of it. You ought to have freed yourself years and years ago."

"I couldn't." April shivered—"there was no case then you see. Besides the desperate hope that kept me struggling on. It's terrible to feel that you're the last hold—that you stand between a man and his moral suicide. And until I was so ill I kept my influence. I pulled him through, and helped him, time after time. And then . . . I couldn't bear it—the secrecy, the strain—I just gave in, gave up, and let things take their course."

"And quite right too—it wasn't fit for a woman! But what d'you mean by not having a case? Seems

to me you'd as sound a one as you could wish. Why, it was hardly safe to live with such a man!"

"That doesn't count from a legal point of view." She smiled a little bitterly at his astonished face. "You can't obtain a divorce in this country for drink. Not even for unfaithfulness, however flagrant it is, unless you can prove personal cruelty as well."

"Are those your laws?" His voice was eloquent. "Thank God, we don't treat women that way! Why, it's slavery, not marriage. D'you really mean to say that you've got to go on living with any sort of mutt, provided he has enough control to keep his hands from off you?"

"Exactly."

"And he with you?"

"Oh dear, no. He can be freed at the first suspicion of his wife's moral conduct. A few love-letters, the testimony of servants, a solitary visit to any man's rooms . . . Oh—don't let's talk of it—it's all . . . so revolting."

"You poor little soul!" He choked back his opinion of her country, conscious of the strain on the tired white face. "But you haven't told me yet what brought you to Coddell—about the wisest thing you ever did in your life!"

She smiled a little sadly at his enthusiasm and went on with her story: her desire for a hiding-place, where she could rest and gather up the threads of her life, unknown, exempt at last from painful publicity.

Van Someren understood. He remembered that curious look that had roused his pity and wonder

when first he saw her face; a shrinking that somehow warred with her air of dignity—the hurt suspicion of a creature badly-used.

"So now, Honey," as at last she paused for breath, "it's up to me to prove all that I have preached. You come to my country and leave the past behind. You've only got to say . . . that you care . . . just a little! I don't think, somehow, you'll ever live to regret it."

His hands were stretched out to her, his strong face pleaded.

"I want to make up to you for all you've gone through—to shew you the very best that love can give. To work for you and care for you and share my life with you—if only, my darling, you'll trust yourself to me?"

But April rose to her feet. She dared not look at him.

"I can't . . . I can't!" She clasped her hands together. "Don't you see that I still am not *morally* free? that I never ought to care for anyone again?"

"But you *do*." Mercilessly he drove the fact home. "And after all it's nothing more than old-world prejudice. You're free even here with your mediæval fool laws—you're doubly free in my land—don't forget that!"

"Lorry," a note of panic crept into her voice, "you wouldn't ask it of me against my own beliefs? To act against my innermost sacred sense of honour?"

Then as he bit his lips, fighting it out in silence, she went on desperately, conscious of the temptation.

"I think too much of you, putting aside myself.

You're one of my . . . lost ideals—something I can't express! And then to wrong you by any weakness of mine . . ." a sob broke from her. "For though I love you, Lorry, if ever I married you, believing myself morally another man's wife, I'd be dragging you down too—we'd be utterly miserable—it never would mean peace for you or for me."

Van Someren wheeled round and walked to the window. With blind eyes he looked out on the dim English scene, the sloping shadowy lawn with its dark belt of trees. The moon, a young crescent, was rising over the river and it lighted up the conflict upon his weary face. And to April as she watched came the full realisation of the sacrifice she asked and the loss it entailed.

"If ever I were free," she stood by his side, "and if you still cared . . ." She broke off midway and her whole heart went out in one bitter cry.

"It's not that I love you too little but that I love you too much . . . Oh, Lorry, Lorry!" He caught her in his arms.

"You're right." His voice broke. "You're all I ever dreamed." He fought for a moment, his lips against her hair.

"It shall be as you wish—though it's hard—cruel hard. But I want you to remember." He looked into her eyes . . . "That I'm still there, Honey. There all the time—waiting for you, longing for you, listening for a sign. You'll never be alone again, as long as you live. There'll always be one man who's near you in spirit, whose thoughts are with you, Honey, by

day and by night—who loves you with every fibre of his soul."

"I know . . . I know." She was crying quietly now, her face hidden against him, sure of herself at last. "And some day, Lorry, some day, perhaps, we shall see our way clear, our way to happiness. But, until then, we must struggle on as bravely as we can——" She lifted a wet face and looked up at him.

"You won't let it hurt you more than you can help! You'll go on with your work and 'make good' just the same? I couldn't bear to think that I had spoilt your life."

"Sure." He smiled back at her. "I'm going to work . . . for *you!* I'll never give up hope or believe this is the end. For I'm dead certain still it will come right at last—it's in that perfect plan that's hidden from our eyes. But don't forget meanwhile what I've been telling you. You're never now to feel you're alone any more—one word and I'll come, wherever I may be—from the ends of the earth, the moment you call."

Gently he smoothed back the hair from off her brow, drinking his fill of the pale beautiful face, with its steadfast eyes shadowed in pain, those blue eyes that gave up the secret of her love.

"I shall go away from here as soon as I can," he went on quietly, speaking his thoughts aloud. "As a matter of fact I'm wanted badly home. I got my marching orders by cable today and was nearly torn asunder by the unexpected call—the knowledge of my

duty and the fear of losing you. I don't think . . . I'll see you after tonight. I don't think it's good . . . for you or for me. So long as I'm certain that you really understand—that you give me your word that if you are in trouble you'll send straight for me, wherever I may be?"

But she could not answer him. Her eyes were on his face, engraving on her memory the lines that she loved. She took—as women will—a picture of him there, to be stored away, a holy thing, against her loneliness.

At last a sound startled them, the distant step of a maid, going round the dark old house to fasten window and door.

It forced on them the realisation of the lateness of the hour, that Time would not wait for the lagging feet of Love.

"I promise you, Lorry."

She lifted up her face and, for a long moment, they clung to each other.

Then, resolutely, he put her away.

"God keep you, Honey . . ." and went out into the dark.

CHAPTER XXIII

"WELL, what did you expect?" April's voice was not encouraging.

Majendie crossed his long legs, and flicked a minute speck of dust off his blue serge suit.

"I suppose, even at Coddell-in-the-dale"—he stole a glance at her, where she stood, her back half-turned to him, looking out on the lawn—"you can't *depend* on a fatted calf?—at a minute's notice, too! Still, a little veal 'en casserole', or a delicate frilled cutlet would go far to comfort me after the late 'husks'. I'm not one of the modern, nut-eating young men. My tastes are healthy, primitive . . . too primitive, perhaps!"

"If you're going to talk like that, Boris"—she gathered up her basket and scissors off the table—"perhaps you will excuse me. I want to cut some flowers."

"Why this sudden horticultural enthusiasm? They look much better growing as they are."

She turned on him with a touch of temper, unconsciously cruel.

"The flowers are for the Bosun's funeral."

"What!" He was on his feet. "Oh, I say, you're joking? Not that jolly little chap? not . . . dead?"

His horror and amazement touched the soft spot in her heart.

"Yes, isn't it dreadful? An accident—on Tuesday."

"Oh, my dear!" He was by her side, genuinely moved. "Oh, April—do forgive me—what an utter beast I am!"

"You didn't know." Her voice was kind; then the insidious memory returned. "But anyhow—oh, what's the use of talking!" With a shrug of her shoulders she stepped down into the garden.

The boy followed her, at his wit's end how to proceed. This unforeseen tragedy had broken his line of defence. He could no longer carry out his original game of bluff, based on that very excuse Van Someren had conceived. For he did not know that April already possessed his secret; that for weeks she had known of the existence of Chloe, and the intrigue she had glimpsed in the far-off London tea-shop.

He was saved from further disaster by the impulse that succeeded to tell her the whole truth—whatever came of it.

"Would you rather that I went away and left you?" But his voice betrayed the reluctance that he felt. "I oughtn't to have come."

At this she relented. His humility rang genuine, his sympathy sincere.

"No—since you are here, just help me with these. Later on . . . we'll talk." She handed him the basket and began to cut the first white chrysanthemums of the year, that stood in a row of pots against the sheltered wall.

The second blooms of the roses followed in their wake, with heavy fragrant heads, where the rain-drops still glistened.

"That's all, I'm afraid." She paused reluctantly, and called to the gardener beyond them, busily engaged in digging a trench for celery.

He drove his spade into the damp ground and came forward obediently, a bent old figure, with slow, rheumatic steps.

"There's them lilies in the green'ouse, mum. But I was a-saving 'em up for the flower-show later." He rubbed the earth ruefully off his gnarled hands, and added:

"Beg pardon, mum, but as you're this way, mebbe you'd like to see that fall o' soil last night?"

"Yes—I'll come." She remembered, with a start. "Mary told me something about it—I hope it's done no harm?"

"It's fair buried them old pig-styes, mum."

He grumbled on, pessimistic after his kind.

The weather, as usual, was answerable for much, but this new disaster he attributed to Providence: the Providence of the poor that wields a heavy flail, to balance—so he held—its indulgence to the rich. Prepared for trouble, even Majendie was a little taken aback, when he came to the narrow space beneath the high cliff. For a mass of chalk and soil had given way above, where the drought had cracked the ground about the fringe of firs.

The violent storm of rain had loosened its fragile hold, and now the roots of the trees emerged nakedly,

like the tentacles of an octopus, reaching out for prey.

"It doesn't look too safe," Boris pronounced uneasily. "You'll be having the whole place about your ears one night."

The gardener seemed to take an acid pleasure in the thought, conscious, perhaps, that he slept in a cottage down the lane.

"It's done it afore"—he shook his grey head—"but this be the wust fall as ever I seed."

"You'd better have some help to clear it away."

April dismissed the affair somewhat indifferently, conscious of her own coming departure.

"I must write and inform the landlord." They turned back to the house, and, lowering her voice, she went on quietly: "I'm leaving here, you see—in a very short time."

"Leaving the Landslide?" Majendie stared at her. "Not really! You're going away?—for good?"

"Yes." She began to tell him of her interview with her godfather, and how she was resolved to abide by his advice.

"And where are you off to?" His face fell at the news. He felt he had lost her, irrevocably.

"I'm not sure—somewhere abroad."

She looked up and caught the boy's worried glance, the wistful eyes that watched her in sad comprehension.

"I can't somehow take it in. It's all too sudden."

He moved restlessly under the burden of his suspicions.

"You'll let me know . . . where you are?" He ventured at last.

Her slim hands were fastening the pale flowers together, binding them into a last sad offering to the dead. Her face was hidden from him, shadowed by her hair—that wonderful hair of hers, that gleamed like a halo about the head of a mediæval saint. With the tall lilies on her knee, the droop of her white neck, she suggested some picture, such as Lippi loved, a madonna that a master had spent his soul upon.

"Perhaps."

"Oh!" An exclamation of pain escaped him at the word. "Is it as bad as that? Is no forgiveness possible?"

"Please . . ." She checked him with a gesture of her hand. "I would rather not talk of it. It is . . . your own affair."

But he stood there obstinately, looking down at her where she sat on the garden seat, absorbed in her task.

"Oh, you women!" He spoke bitterly. "How the best of you will hit a man when he's down!"

She started at this, her pride pricked by the speech.

"That's hardly fair, Boris." Her voice was dignified. "But, if I have misjudged you, you have only to explain."

To her surprise he took her at her word.

"Very well. I will."

"One minute, please." She went indoors with the flowers and gave directions for their delivery. Then, with the colour in her cheeks, more nervous than she

cared to confess, she returned to the man waiting impatiently without.

He drew forward a chair for her and then sat down, facing her across the narrow table.

It struck her suddenly that here was the identical scene where she herself had confessed her deception to Van Someren.

The knowledge in a curious way softened her mood as she thought of his sympathy and her own hesitation. For love begets pity for the whole world of lovers; and, looking into the boy's face, she could not remain blind to the suffering that was there so plainly manifest.

"I'm not going," Majendie began, "to defend what I have done. But I want you to hear *all* before you start to judge. I know"—he stared past her—"it's practically impossible for a woman to realise . . . some things about a man. They can't, for instance, discriminate between real love and passion. They won't admit that the two can well exist apart. Now, I know what you think—that I've been playing a game, leading two lives, *pretending* to care for you! And all the time carrying on a secret intrigue; a sort of poor Don Juan, spending his time, fooling around among a pack of women!"

His voice rose heatedly, his lips curled with disdain, as April sat in silence, a frown upon her face.

"Now, I don't want to shock you—still less hurt your feelings. God knows it's hard enough to find you involved—you, above all people! Petronilla . . .

I never meant you to know—I never dreamed you could."

He leaned forward a little and spoke in a lower tone.

"I told you once how I pictured you, how I always saw you stand: a little blue madonna, in a far-off golden shrine. Something quite holy, something apart, that a man must love in a spirit of reverence. Well—you are there still—you will stand there forever—nothing can really alter it, short of death itself. But out and away from that, there's a more material side—one is a land of dreams—the other, a man's life."

He saw her give a slight movement of recoil, and went on hurriedly, before she had time to speak.

"I'll tell you the story—just the bare outline. About a year ago a man I knew at school asked me to go and look up his young sister. She'd got some weird notion concerning independence and had taken a post as waitress in a tea-shop in Town. I used to drop in and have tea sometimes, but she quickly tired of it and went down home—a good thing, too—it's a rotten life for a girl! But she introduced me to another waitress there—an awfully pretty child, though not in her class. Well—the long and the short of it was . . . she rather took my fancy." He paused for a moment, with a furtive glance at April, and was momentarily surprised by the expression of her face. For she knew he was speaking the plain, unvarnished truth. She was interested by it, with a fugitive, vague

hope that the boy might clear himself—at least partially.

"She led a lonely life, a stranger herself in town—and poor isn't the word to describe her condition. I found this out by accident, and after that, somehow, I used to take her out and we'd have dinner together. It seemed a howling shame—a girl like that, you know—half-starved"—he shrugged his shoulders—"for that's what it amounted to. And then I found she'd other worries to bear as well. The usual story, of a would-be benefactor—a married man, disgustingly old and quite disgustingly rich. He'd already given her presents in a fatherly sort of way, and she didn't know what to do when she realised what he meant. It's hard when the shoe pinches, and there's no earthly outlook and a girl's as pretty as paint and on her own like that."

He broke off for a moment, his young face thoughtful. Then he took the bit between his teeth and plunged in again.

"Well—I'm not a saint! I don't suppose I'm worse—or better perhaps—than most of the men one meets. And I was about fed up with London and London ways. It's all right when it's new and you've got plenty of cash—you can hold your own with your own sort and have a clinking time. But after a bit it's the loneliness that grips a man hard. You're only a mere unit in the busy social crowd, and to keep in the swing means constant expense. There's precious little *real* friendliness about—nobody wants you to drop in to have a chat and smoke. If they've not got

a party on they're taking a rest themselves. One gets sick of the Halls, and, as for the average club—if you've joined an old respectable one, it's as gay as a family vault. Well—there you are, you see, night after night—with nothing for it but home to your empty, dingy rooms. That blank return! You can't think how one gets to dread the thought . . .”

He gave a little shrug of unpleasant reminiscence.

“You see, at school, in the holidays, at one's crammer's, there's always *someone*. You get so used to having people around that you don't in the least realise what living alone will mean.”

“It *must* be dreary,” April's voice was grave, “but I suppose your work to a certain extent absorbs you?”

“Yes—if you've got any!” He gave a short laugh, “But mine's principally hanging around waiting for a miracle. Of course, I've plenty of pals, and I knock about with them, but it's not quite the same. I like women's society. I believe I'm really domestic, and, as to thinking of marriage, it's about as useful a notion as arranging one's life in Heaven. At any rate I couldn't dream of it in *my* class, on *my* income.”

“But you wouldn't marry beneath you?”

She spoke impulsively. Surely he had not committed this last fatal folly!

“No—I don't *think* so—but what's a man to do? That's the curse of the present day—you can't marry young. And a man was made before a monk—in the interests of the race!—we won't argue about it—it's an indisputable fact. Well, I'm getting away from the point.” He steered from the obvious quicksand.

"One day, we were dining together, and I saw she was looking ill—worried to death, in fact, and the truth came out later. She'd made up her mind that poverty wasn't really worth it—to throw her bonnet over the mill—and *hey presto!* for pretty clothes. Well—I liked her—and I couldn't stand the thought. So I mapped out an alternative course of action. Bradsby had lent me his cottage—and, although it wasn't luxury, still"—he gave a little smile—"it had its compensations. We were both to continue our work; run up by the morning train and back again in the evening in time for a simple meal. It might have been idyllic—if only she'd learnt to cook . . . Lord! the messes we ate!" His face was eloquent. "Of course you'll say the whole thing was wild, improvident, wrong—utterly immoral, without a shade of excuse. That's the woman's view. But—to *my* mind—it had the merit of a certain . . . sweet simplicity. It was out and away better than the average life in town."

He paused for a moment, his brows knit, and April, watching him, saw there was no bravado in it, but a simple statement of what he really felt.

"You don't seem to have weighed your own responsibility: to have thought of the girl's position or what was to be the end!"

At her serious voice Boris turned with a start.

"The girl? Why, of course I did." He spoke impatiently. "She was bound to come to it, as I've already told you. Half her friends, you see, were being . . . helped by men. Why, it's practically rec-

ognised in most of the swagger shops. Those pretty mannequins—how d'you suppose they live? They can't support themselves in decency on their wages."

"Is that really a fact, or largely exaggerated?"

April's face was grave as the thought sank home.

"It's a fact. Why? It can't be news to you?"

He stared at her in honest surprise. Then a shade of malice crept into his face, as he went on deliberately, glad to vent his own scorn on anything that was handy.

"They're sacrificed, if you like, to a higher cult than morality—in the interests of large dividends, the commerce of the nation. Of course we ignore it like many unpleasant things; say—the . . . disabilities of our main streets after dusk. It's the virtue of shut eyes. Mrs. Grundy got the notion from Watt's picture of Hope blindfold among the stars . . ."

He checked the ribald fancy, half-angry, half-amused, and went on with a serious countenance.

"Well, you see how it came about? The . . . episode, I mean. But all this only covers one side of the story. What I want you to understand—what's far more difficult"—he leaned forward with wistful, troubled eyes—"is my . . . unexplained attitude to yourself."

"Is it necessary?" She drew back a little. Then, as she saw him wince, repented her decision.

"Very well—if you wish to. I said I would listen."

"Thank you." But his voice showed his keen mortification.

"Of course you think—what any woman would—

that I'd no business here. And, perhaps . . . you're right." He gave an eloquent gesture, a half shrug of his shoulders, oddly foreign, that reminded her of his Russian origin. "But, you see, it all began before I *really* knew you, before I learned to care—well, more than a friend. And then . . . it was too late. I *couldn't* give you up. But you had your revenge—if ever you dreamed of one!"

The bitterness he felt vibrated in his voice.

"I wonder if you can guess—can possibly imagine the misery your very unconsciousness brought at times? For, if ever a man was haunted, I was haunted by you. Your hair, your voice, your eyes, would rise up and mock me—stand like a ghost beside that other . . . pretence at passion! Oh, April, April!"—the name was almost a cry—"if you can't forgive or pity—just pause a moment and *think*: what my love for you meant—the hopelessness of it!—the knowledge that you trusted me—your utter sweetness to me—and all the time I knew what a damned fool I was!"

His voice choked; he struck the table with his hand. He dared not look at her; he could not hope for grace, but his facile tongue ran on, pouring out despair.

"Did you ever read some poems by a man called Ernest Dowson? There's one of them that's written in words of blood and flame. If anything on earth could make you understand—the Man's view, as utterly opposed to the Woman's—the real, naked sight of a virile soul in pain, stripped of orthodoxy,

innocent of moral—it's these two verses that always bring your face to torture me."

He threw his head back, thinking for a moment, then, with eyes half-shut, utterly absorbed in the words:

"I have forgot much, Cynara! gone with the wind
 Flung roses, roses riotously with the throng,
 Dancing, to put thy pale, lost lilies out of mind;
 But I was desolate and sick of an old passion.
 Yea, all the time, because the dance was long:
 I have been faithful to thee, Cynara! in my fashion.

'I cried for madder music and for stronger wine,
 But when the feast is finished and the lamps expire,
 Then falls thy shadow, Cynara! the night is thine;
 And I am desolate and sick of an old passion,
 Yea, hungry for the lips of my desire:
 I have been faithful to thee, Cynara! in my fashion.'"

Carried away by the lines, he hid his hot face for a moment in his hands.

And then it seemed to him that a miracle happened. For he felt a light touch on his hair, gentle fingers that lay there for a moment tenderly.

"Poor boy!" Her eyes were full of tears. "My poor boy," she cried.

"April!" He raised his head and stared at her. "April—" He could not get beyond her name.

"Perhaps"—she looked at him with a faint, sad smile—"I'm *not* one of those who 'hit a man when he's down'. I do try to be fair, I do try to be just. For what's the use of life"—her eyes were far away—"of all the sin and suffering we have each to bear,

if it doesn't lead in the end to a broader charity—a faint realisation of the mercy we ask of God.

"I think you've done a cruel wrong to that poor, heedless child. I can't find an excuse for it, but I *do* see this—that somehow, along your own lines of thought and principle—" She paused, at a loss for words, leaving her meaning plain.

"But I blame myself, too—it ought not to have happened—not . . . *my* part—I should have realised."

"My dear"—he gave a little laugh that shook midway—"however could you help it? The Queen can do no wrong. But you won't go away and send me never a word? You won't punish me with utter banishment?"

Simply, in answer, she held out her hand. It was a silent pardon that he recognised. He bent his head over it; then drew back quickly, before his lips could touch the fingers that he loved. And this act of renunciation, more than any words, shewed her his repentance, his sensitive chivalry.

It wiped away her last scrupulous shadow of doubt, and she made up her mind on the question that was troubling her.

"Boris"—she looked at him—"will you do something to please me?"

"Anything." He jumped at a chance of earning forgiveness.

"You must wait and hear first and think it carefully through. It's something Sir Hugo has written and suggested."

"Sir Hugo Gervase?" He looked surprised.
"About me?—really?"

"Yes." She hunted for the letter and spread it out before her. "It seems an old friend of his is in a difficulty. His son has been very ill, with an attack of typhoid fever. He's now convalescent, but it's left him delicate, and the doctors have recommended a sea voyage to the Cape and on to Japan, America, and home that way. It will take about nine months, or possibly a year—they're very well off and can afford to do it comfortably. But he wants a companion to travel with the boy; older than himself, but young enough to amuse him. Not a tutor—he has a horror of that—someone bright and healthy who'll be kind and sympathetic.

"Sir Hugo thought of you and suggested I should ask you. All expenses paid and it might lead in the end to something permanent. This is all rather vague, but there's a large estate and this is the only son; and, of course, he understands that if a man gives up his own work for a year he naturally expects some adequate compensation. I don't think you need worry at all upon this point—it's open to discussion when a meeting is arranged. The main thing is"—she paused and looked at him, her eyes clear and kind, searching his own—"they want to find a man whom they can thoroughly trust."

"Oh!" Majendie flushed scarlet. He bit his lower lip.

"And you . . . think you could recommend *me* for the post?"

"Yes." She nodded her head. "I do, Boris, now."

He sat for a moment speechless, staring straight before him, realising all that her simple speech implied.

"It means a year's absence: a year away from you." Jerkily the words fell from his lips.

"I think, perhaps," she smiled at him, "hard as it sounds, it's wise. But you'd have to start soon. Now, is that possible?"

"Quite. There's nothing to keep me." He saw her puzzled frown. "I've shut up the cottage."

She gave a little start.

"But . . . ?" She hesitated under his dark eyes.

"She's gone home," said Boris. "That's over—for good. She's gone back to her people. I think we were both glad. A life of perpetual picnic is apt to drag a little—especially when it rains and all the chimneys smoke! I don't want to talk of it—but your visit, the other day, gave me the excuse: to go to the door like that! Oh, and lots of other drawbacks. It was getting too expensive. She'd given up the tea-shop a few weeks before and was spending her leisure hours acquiring a trousseau. She'd lie in bed all day whilst the place went to pieces—and the *food!* . . . Anyhow, it's all over"—he gave a sigh of relief—"though it's left me pretty broke, between you and me. Sweet simplicity has its price! And another sage reflection is how much virtue owes to satiety and discomfort. I suppose there's some merit in the well-used adage. At any rate, I'm 'good' now—but I'm not particularly 'happy'."

This was the Boris of old, flippant, but sincere, one eyebrow raised in a whimsical self-depreciation.

And April could not scold him. She felt an intense relief to hear of Chloe's departure and to see her way clear.

"Then you'll call on Sir Hugo's friend? And talk it well over?"

His face fell suddenly at her quiet tone of voice. It held out for him a definite note of finality.

"You wish it, April?" His brown eyes pleaded for him, wistful and dark with pain, awaiting her decision.

An odd foretaste of loneliness swept across her heart. It seemed the last stroke of the knife that cut her adrift.

But beyond that she saw a future for the boy—a definite turning-point in his aimless, lonely life.

"Yes." She nodded her head. She could not say more.

"Then I'll do it!" said Majendie, "if only to prove . . . I care."

CHAPTER XXIV

THE night was close and still, with the presage of a storm. In the stableyard beyond the shadowy garden Esau was holding converse with the moon, a pessimistic performance, regular and sustained.

The melancholy sound troubled April, herself restless with the electricity in the air. She finished her dinner hastily, and passed out onto the lawn, turning her steps in the direction of the kennel.

The dark cliff rose overhead with its feathery rim of firs like a black wall cutting the blue-green evening sky, and above it again, purple, ominous, a thunder-cloud hung, lined with a copper glow. The moon in a watery halo seemed to retreat before it, throwing an opal fan of light on the cobblestones of the yard. It magnified the shadows and cast a silhouette, grotesque and misshapen, of Esau's shaggy head on the whitewashed wall of the stables beyond.

April passed through the gate and called to the big dog, who greeted her in return with a frantic bark of delight, freed from the obsession of that blank white face that shone down on his misery with such a frozen calm.

She bent to unfasten him where he squirmed at the end of his chain. Then, as he broke away in a curveting dance around her, she called him back to

heel, and, slipping the lash of her whip through his strong collar, led him by her side out into the garden.

But when they came to the stone seat under the high bank, she sat down breathlessly, conscious of the oppression in the air. The dog lay at her feet, panting a little, his black nose outstretched, the red tongue hanging, where beads of moisture gathered and fell on the path below.

"Poor old fellow!—it must be hot work wearing a motor-coat on a sultry night like this."

She stroked the rough head, glad of his company, a little sadly, too, as she thought of another parting and that she must leave her shaggy friend behind.

The memory of his coming drifted across her mind; that merry scene that seemed such years and years ago. For the tragedy of the child's death and her own secret troubles had played a trick with Time, casting all but the latter weeks into a distant past.

The Van Somerens had sailed. Majendie in his turn had paid his farewell visit to the lady of the Landslide. The Newcomens' house was shut; for the sailor had taken his wife to a little fishing village within an hour of his ship, where her heart could no longer be torn by the ghost of pattering feet. April was definitely alone at last, faced with the details of her own departure.

Her plans were carefully laid. The servants already knew of her approaching visit to "friends in the North".

The house was on her hands until the end of October and she had declined an offer to renew the lease.

She decided to slip away without formal farewells and write from abroad her final arrangements. The servants could stay on, expecting her return until the time drew near for giving up the house.

Meanwhile April packed her scattered belongings, filled with a vague dread of all that lay before her. To go back into the world and take up her position, nervously aware that the old order had changed: to face again gossip and unfriendliness under the smiling mask that hid her hurt pride.

Nevertheless a curious comfort walled her about, the knowledge of Van Someren's unchanging love for her. At times in the solitude of the house among the trees it seemed an actual presence, a spirit that hovered near that neither Time nor Space could sever from her own.

The memory of his last words—that he needed but a sign to call him back to her on the fleet wings of love, one word and she would see that strong face again—was like the dream of a sunlit port to a weary mariner.

But to-night, as she sat there under the cliff with the sheep dog at her feet, she felt a cloud of depression closing over her; a brooding sense of danger that hovered in the air and was more than the influence of the approaching storm.

She stirred herself at last, resolved to fight against it, and, holding the dog by his improvised leash, she walked across the lawn towards the river banks.

The silence could be felt. Not a bird nor a leaf stirred. All Nature held her breath in a mute prayer

for rain. The water when she reached it seemed like a great snake, stretched between the willows where the leaves drooped mournfully. Only a patch of irises, yellow and persistent, hung out their bannerets against the dark boat-house; and April moved towards them, attracted by their beauty, in the waning light as the moon crept up to the thunder-cloud.

But as she paused beside them a sound broke on her ear, faint but unmistakable, from the shadowy belt of trees. Something was stirring there; she heard the twigs snap and simultaneously the dog began to growl.

A faint thrill of fear raced through her veins; she bent her head to listen, above the beating of her heart.

Silence. Then, afresh, the dry leaves rustled, the dry earth complained beneath a stealthy tread. Again Esau growled, straining at his collar with that fierce low snarl that claims origin from the wolf.

"Steady, boy, steady." April held him back. Then she raised her voice. "Who's there?" she cried.

The noise ceased at once. But the dog stood tense, his hair bristling up in a ridge along his spine. Looking down at him, she gathered fresh courage, conscious of the strength of her four-footed friend.

She walked boldly forward, peering among the trees. Surely a dim form moved among the shadows there?

"If you don't come out at once," her voice rang sharp, "I shall loose the dog on you."

"For God's sake, *don't!*"

The quick cry startled her with its sharp note of fear.

And something else besides; for, from its hiding-place, dead memories stirred—a breathless doubt that gathered form and shape, as into the light a man limped forth, in answer to her call. His clothes were white with dust; he tottered on his feet, his dark hair was matted about his white face. Only his eyes, bright and feverish, seemed alive in the haggard countenance.

For a moment he stared at her, dumbfounded as herself.

“Petronilla! *You!*” He staggered back a pace and caught at a low bough to steady himself.

She very nearly loosed the dog, who growled furiously. Then her anger rose, sweeping away fear.

“How dare you!” She whispered it, pale cheeks aflame. “How *dare* you come here—to my house—like this?”

And still he stared at her, as though he saw a ghost.

“I didn’t know”—he found his voice—“I swear—I didn’t—know . . .”

The last words faltered, he clutched at the tree, but the weak fingers slid away, he swayed on his feet and went down, helplessly, in a crumpled heap before her.

A wave of disgust passed over April’s face. She gave a quick glance back at the silent house. The blank windows answered her; there was no help near,

and she braced herself to face the task that awaited her.

The dog seemed to understand as she drew away the leash.

"Lie down—good boy. Be quiet, now!" He squatted, nose outstretched, watching with an air of disapproval as she kneeled by the side of the prostrate man and laid a hand nervously upon the thin wrist.

The pulse beat feebly, and, as she raised his head, the eyelids flickered in their blue-shadowed depths. Then the dark eyes opened and a faint wan smile stole across the lines of the weak but beautiful mouth. "So . . . sorry"—feebly the words came—"ashamed to . . . trouble you . . . like this."

The simple apology touched her, and, exerting all her strength, she drew him a little nearer to the friendly tree, so that he lay, propped, with his shoulders against it.

"Is that better?" Her voice was gentle now, as she saw a spasm of pain contract the thin face.

"It's this . . . confounded . . . ankle!"—he winced as he spoke—"I believe I've . . . broken it . . . getting over . . . the wall . . ."

He closed his eyes again, incapable of more, whilst April steadied him, collecting her wits.

He seemed to have sunk back into unconsciousness again, but, as she rose to her feet, a faint whisper reached her.

"Petro . . . nilla . . ." It was but the echo of her name.

"Yes?" She bent over him. "I'm going to fetch some help."

"No, no! Don't leave me!" He caught at her skirt with a desperate clutch of the thin, nerveless hand.

"Don't . . . call . . . anyone. I've run . . . away . . ." he gasped, "and if they . . . sent me back. My God, no! *not that . . .!*"

His voice rose shrill, his face was pitiful. Instinctively she soothed him, a steady hand on his.

"No one shall know—you're safe here with me." The old phrase rose by custom to her lips. He looked up at her with sudden comprehension.

"I'm not drunk." Simply he stated the fact. "I'm starving—that's all! No food . . . since yesterday."

Her face warmed with pity; but she wondered, nevertheless, what lay behind the incredible adventure.

"I'm going to get you some. You must trust to me." Gently she disengaged her dress from his grasp. "Shall I leave the dog with you? He'll see that no one comes."

"Yes." He nodded his head with a sigh of relief.

Her brain worked quickly as she sped across the grass.

"Not brandy . . . I daren't! Let me think, let me think . . ."

But when she reached the dining-room the question answered itself. For there before her lay her neglected coffee, left at last by Lottie, who had failed to find her mistress.

"The very thing"—she caught it up, one hand

against the silver—"it's still hot—that's lucky!" She glanced at the sideboard and added a large slice of cake to the tray.

Across the lawn again to the shadows by the boathouse where the lax figure lay propped against the tree, the sheep dog beside him, stiffly on guard.

She held the hot coffee up to the man's lips, her mouth tight with the effort to overcome her physical distaste as she supported the limp head with her arm. And slowly he revived. He took the cake from her and ravenously devoured it, conscious of nothing but the presence of food. Then when the last crumb had disappeared, the last drop was drained from the little coffee-pot, he leaned back with a sigh of relief, looking up at her.

"I want you to understand," his voice sounded stronger, "I've run away from Foxton—from that private . . . hell there."

A sudden light broke in on her.

"Do you mean the Doctor's place—where they take in patients . . . dipsomaniacs?"

"Exactly." Bitterness lay in the word. "I've been there . . . a fortnight"—he gave a little shudder—"I give you my honour I didn't know that *you* . . . were anywhere in the neighborhood. It's all like a dream. They told me it was a 'rest-cure'. I'd been . . . pretty bad, and I chose Foxton among some other places, because it seemed to be off the beaten track. I thought you were abroad—I swear it, Petronilla."

"Of course—you couldn't tell." She nodded her

head. "But why did you run away? Weren't they kind to you?"

"*Kind!*" His voice rose excitedly, his thin face worked. "I'd sooner drown myself in the river down there than go through the torture of those days . . . and nights again!"

A sudden peal of thunder drowned the last words, and, as April started with the deafening clap, the first drops fell on the dry leaves above.

"You can't stay here"—she winced again at another vivid flash, and the rain began in earnest, straight shafts of water that rattled on the ground—"it isn't safe. Besides, you'll be soaked through and through. Do you think, with my help, you could get as far as the house?"

"Whose house is it?" he asked suspiciously, but drew himself up into a sitting position.

"It's mine. I'm quite alone. Try and stand now."

Shakily, his hands in hers, he rose to his feet.

"If I could hide here for a day or two?—until the hunt's over . . ." His face hardened suddenly, as he saw her expression. "Oh, I know it's damned unfair!—a mad thing to ask—but it's my only chance! —it's that or the river. And, honestly, I don't care which . . . I'll never go back alive—that's certain, Petronilla. You can decide for me—I leave it in your hands."

Full well she knew the mood: the half-boastful threat of the dipsomaniac in his hour of dark depression. But the rain lashed down and the sky was torn

in two by a forked, venomous streak that let loose the thunder.

This was no time to weigh conventional scruples. "Come." She drew his arm steadily through hers, calling to Esau to follow her at heel.

Limping, pausing, catching his breath, he stumbled up the path, aided by the boughs of the trees on either side.

Painfully, at last, they reached the verandah and stood for a second, thankful for shelter. Then on again towards the open window, where the lamp shed a warm welcome towards them. But, as April neared the light, a sudden weakness took her—a shrinking that verged on the borderline of nausea.

That *he* should enter the house—the house of memories . . .

She steadied herself, her hand upon the latch. And it seemed as if her mood infected the man. The same reluctance held him back—a scruple of good taste—the ghost of that fine breeding not wholly laid by drink.

"I can't—I daren't"—he shivered—"it's no good, Petronilla."

At this she turned and looked at him a little wonderingly.

In the golden light of the lamp within he could see her shining eyes, a faint, proud smile that lay upon her lips.

For there and then it came to her—the supreme revelation: that nothing now could touch her, she set her soul free.

Never again could failure fret at her heart with the knowledge she had left him—a weakling—to his fate.

Strong and sweet and pitiful she stretched forth her hands and helped the husband of her youth into sanctuary.

CHAPTER XXV

THE DOCTOR came and went. She told him the whole story, but under that seal of confession that in modern times applies to the medical man as often as the priest. He listened gravely to her, deeply interested, stirred to the depths of his virile soul by the woman's steady courage. They held the same broad view on the question of drink, foreseeing that day when Science should prevail, sweeping away the litter of sentimental ignorance that lies so thick about this form of hereditary disease.

But they saw, too, the stumbling-block that lay in its path: a public condonation for the vicious and the weak—that large army of wastrels that lies midway between the casual drinker and the dipsomaniac.

April's immediate fear was not for a lack of sympathy. She had guessed the Doctor's theories that day in the lane when with Van Someren she had met him returning from his patient. But she wondered what his professional attitude would be when she disclosed the fact of her husband's flight from Foxton. She knew that "medical etiquette" was a strong force to combat.

But here she was met by an unexpected factor in support of her request for absolute secrecy. Foxton House bore a curious reputation, and the country doctors around eyed it askance. It was a commercial

venture of a Swedish physician. A fully qualified man, he yet held himself aloof from those of his fraternity in the neighbourhood. Rumour—ever at work around locked gates—hinted the patients were ill-fed, the alleged “cure” a fable. The visiting inspector could lodge no open objection, but there it was—an eyesore in the frank countryside.

April’s entreaty, added to this, swept aside those scruples that the Doctor voiced half-heartedly before he accepted the case. Once won over, he was a sturdy ally, anxious as herself to keep the matter quiet.

He saved them both the constant dread of possible discovery by sending a letter up to be posted in town in which the sufferer, withholding his address, declined to return for the completion of the “cure”, and, knowing the man with whom he had to deal, enclosed a further cheque to settle the affair. For the Doctor plainly saw that the patient’s shattered nerves could stand no further strain on his vitality.

The ankle was badly sprained, a mere question of time, but the weakened constitution was a far graver matter. He lay in bed, passive, willing to be nursed, pathetically eager to meet his wife’s wishes, a shadow of the man who twelve years before had won her girlish and inexperienced heart.

To the household he was known as Mrs. Panhasard’s brother. The two country maids accepted without demur the theory of a sudden visit to Coddell, turned into tragedy by a motor accident, from which in the storm he had painfully made his way, step by step, to the door of his sister’s house.

The story sounded so thin that April's courage sank as she poured it desperately into their wondering ears. But any excitement was welcome in the lonely, dull old house, and the bustle of preparation absorbed their reasoning powers.

Mary Tuckett revelled in calf's foot jelly and soup and a long recital of a strange coincidence: how her mother's brother had once sprained his knee. Lottie, not to be beaten, remembered the fate of a cousin, whose arm had been broken, falling out of a tree. The cure had been expedited undoubtedly by splints; she offered to assist when the Doctor bandaged the patient.

They turned the morning-room into a hospital ward where the invalid later on would be saved the steep stairs.

And, so long as he lay in bed, April saw her way, but she feared the days to come, the hour of convalescence.

For the Doctor was rigid as herself on one point. Not a drop of alcohol must pass the patient's lips. This was the only hope. At present in his weakness, the "cure" he had half-achieved still held the craving under, but how long this would last the Doctor could not say.

He knew that the first taste of drink was to precipitate disaster. The man was sodden through and through; it had reached the weakened brain.

But the faint flag of hope still fluttered from the mast, and April turned her eyes to it with that strong optimism that the constant failure of the past could

dim but not destroy. She had a curious certitude that approached superstition that Fate could not have thrown the man once more across her path without some hidden motive, a consolation, perhaps, for all that she had suffered unjustly at his hands.

If only she could build him up, put new strength into him, guarding him from temptation whilst a better habit formed, a miracle might be wrought at the end of the chapter, and she could go forth with a great burden lifted, upheld by this knowledge to face her lonely life.

The unconventionality of this "second act" of Divorce hardly claimed its fair proportion in her mind. It was in keeping with the whole fairy-tale that had gathered about her at Coddell-in-the-dale.

But she wondered what Van Someren would say when he heard of it. She did not write to him, withheld by a scruple, knowing the natural jealousy of the man. After it was over she would tell him the adventure, and, perhaps, add to it a crown of success!

She knew that she was doing right, herself "making good". She had no ultimate doubt of her lover's opinion; but, meanwhile, she suppressed the news in her weekly letter, fearing to awaken his loving apprehension.

Her feeling towards her husband was curiously complex. Of passion there was none, long since burnt out. She shrank from him, but mastered it in the interests of duty. He took the place merely of a sick and helpless child, who had strayed to her for shel-

ter, orphaned and alone. But the thin thread of habit ran through it all. He had played too long a part in her intimate home life to become a perfect stranger at the mandate of the law. Love was utterly dead, but pity remained, strengthened by the knowledge of how well she "understood".

She realised still more the truth of all she preached—that only death could leave her morally free. The father of her dead child, the man who turned to her for strength in his weakness at every feeble step, could not be laid aside as one virtually slain, leaving a road clear for the man whom she loved.

But even Van Someren's image grew dim in her mind during the anxious days when the Doctor came and went. For exposure and shock had brought on a chill, and the chance of Pneumonia—that danger to the drunkard—hovered persistently overhead.

Hovered but passed away, and, after a watchful week, the patient commenced to mend, steadily to gain ground.

He shewed a sudden interest in his own recovery, began to welcome food, and—best of all—to sleep, that far-off hopeless quest of the dipsomaniac.

The Doctor himself wondered at the change in his condition.

Mary Tuckett ascribed it to "the beef-tea *always* jellied!" But the truth was that he had that recuperative power that so often accompanies the type whom drink attracts.

With his subtle charm of manner, his low, musical voice, and that air of good breeding that still clung

about him, it was easy to conceive the attitude of his world, forgiving him his weaknesses for the sake of his company.

- Lottie, the red-cheeked, was his immediate slave. She admitted it in the kitchen, but gave as her excuse that he was "as like the missus as two peas in a pod—anyone could see that they was brother and sister!"

Oddly enough, there *was* a faint resemblance; a simplicity that achieved an effect of dignity. The same slender hands and high-arched, narrow feet, the small head well-set, the pallor of the skin.

The village heard the news with indifferent interest, still absorbed by the funeral of the Bosun.

But Mrs. Moneypenny, like an old war-horse, threw up her head and snorted, scenting fresh battle.

Here was the opportunity so long denied her, a chance of probing the mystery that veiled the unknown lady. A Brother! The Vicaress thanked her God for the answer to her prayer. Now she could probe thoroughly Mrs. Panhasard's past!

But when she called to enquire, Lottie stood firm. Her mistress was "not at home". Her mistress was "quite well". Her mistress would be "sorry to have missed Mrs. Moneypenny".

"Perhaps Mrs. Panhasard's brother . . . I don't know his name?"

"Mr. Desmond," said Lottie, filling in the pause.

"No doubt Mr. Desmond would like to see the Vicar?" The lady turned up viciously the corner of her card.

"Yes'm. I'll enquire when the mistress comes in." But Mrs. Moneypenny suspicioned the evasion.

"You're quite sure she's out!" She raised her shrill voice. "I wonder that she likes to leave her patient alone."

"Mr. Desmond's asleep, mum. He's getting on nicely." Loyally the little maid resented the suggestion.

She opened the door of the Governess Cart with a swing of her tails.

"Nasty old cat!" she said to herself. "Always peering and poking about where she ain't wanted."

Meanwhile the Vicaress gathered up the reins, her face dark with the unexpected check.

"You will please tell your mistress that the Vicar will call." She turned the long-suffering animal's head down-hill. He knew what that tug at his old mouth meant and decided to move as slowly as he could.

But here a sound of wheels fell on his ears. The Doctor was driving up behind the chestnut mare. So the brown pony altered his determination, and "showed off" by ambling at his normal homeward pace.

The Vicaress bowed coldly. The Doctor raised his hat. There was no love lost between the village pair. She knew of old that he brooked no interference and overcame her desire to return and "talk things out".

As the dog-cart drew up before the stone porch, April, fresh and smiling, peeped forth from the hall. "You've just missed a friend of yours." She ventured to appear as the distant gate clicked behind the pony-cart. "Don't tell her you saw me. I'm sup-

posed to be far away, neglecting my patient for healthy exercise!"

"So you can now—whenever you feel inclined. He's practically well. He can get up tomorrow."

She led the doctor into the cool drawing-room. Then, as the door closed, her smile faded away.

"Is that really so? You think it's . . . wise?" She looked up at the grave face of the thoughtful, kindly man.

"I shan't let him walk at all. He can lie on the sofa. We'll check his getting about—as long as we can."

"Thank you." She understood. "That's all I feared." Their eyes met comprehensively; there was no need for words.

He smiled as he gazed at her—at the sweet oval face, with its glory of hair, and clear, unflinching eyes.

"You're quite certain," he went on, following up the thought, "there's nothing in the house that's likely to attract him? I really believe, you know, they have a sixth sense in the same way that water-finders realise water—only, unfortunately," he shrugged his shoulders, "it doesn't, with them, appeal to the teetotal side!"

"There's one bottle of brandy in the sideboard in the dining-room; that's literally all there is in the place. It's locked up securely, and—you'll laugh, I expect!"—she drew a key forth from inside her dress, suspended on a narrow ribbon around her neck—"it's with me night and day." She nodded her head wisely.

"I'd get rid of it, but I don't *quite* like to—in case of an accident or sudden illness, you know. The lock is a Chubb, so there can't be any risk. And the servants don't take beer—luckily for us! They're both of them teetotalers, and Tom Tucket, too. All the Tuckets are. So I think we're safe—unless, of course, he can get as far as Coddell."

"Well—we'll try and stop that—anyhow for a bit. He doesn't seem to want it, but you never can tell. The cunning that they shew is a part of the disease—you can never, never trust them! They can't trust themselves."

He moved towards the door.

"I shan't let him know how the ankle really is. He must stick to the sofa for another week at least."

"Yes." Her face was thoughtful, for, tucked in her belt, was a letter from Sir Hugo that troubled her sorely.

This indefinite lingering on annoyed the old man, and he wrote very strongly, urging her to depart.

"Can I see Lord Essenden now? I'm rather rushed today."

"Of course." Her conscience smote her as they passed into the hall. "You'll find him quite cheerful. He sleeps so much better—without those awful dreams. It seems to be making another man of him. I really begin to think . . ."

She left the phrase unfinished, but her blue eyes were shining as she lifted them to his.

The Doctor smiled back into the brave face. "I

hope so—this time. If anyone could work a miracle, it's you."

He watched her pause before the door to tuck away carefully the tell-tale ribbon that hung around her neck.

"You ought to have been a nurse." His voice was abrupt. But she realised the magnitude of the compliment implied.

CHAPTER XXVI

SEPTEMBER with his harvest moon had sauntered in dry-eyed. And, wherever his russet tunic brushed the burnt-up grass, red leaves and golden bracken quivered beneath his touch; and the chestnuts fell, and the acorn-cups, and the trees cast off their dead and across the corn the mellow voice of Autumn filled the land.

Then in the radiant heavens a little cloud appeared, large as a man's hand, black against the blue; a shepherd's warning this, known to the countryside as a forerunner of heavy rain, the pregnant "bag o' soot."

Great banks of purple drove up from the West, massed like an army and began to loose the hail.

The crops still standing went under like trampled gold; the orchards bowed their heads and mourned their fallen fruit, and a gleaming veil of rain knit the sky to earth and sent the river flooded forth in tumult through the dale.

Tonight the violence of the storm seemed to have reached its height. Like a prisoner trapped between the hills the wind spent itself in impotent gusty fury against the high trees. Boughs creaked and branches snapped and the gale went whistling by, driving the rain in a whirl of wet before its beating wings.

It dashed against the walls of the Landslide as it

passed, and the old house quivered and shook with every blow. The rain upon the window-panes, in ceaseless vibration, stung the sense of hearing like a distant Gatling gun, and the wind pierced its way through every chink and crack, as though its spirit claimed the right of entry there, to hold a Witches' Sabbath in the dim panelled hall.

The hour was close on midnight, but April could not sleep, though her room was partly sheltered by the overhanging cliff. She could hear the belt of firs shudder and creak and moan, where it clung desperately to its perilous foothold. And at last, tired of lying there staring into the dark, she rose from her bed, and, crossing the room, stirred up the dying coals into a blaze. For Lottie had insisted that the room "felt damp" and that a "bit o' fire were always company".

April threw on a dressing-gown, and, pulling an arm-chair close, with her feet on the fender, warmed herself in the glow.

Her thoughts turned instinctively to her visitor below, with that insistence with which illness absorbs the mind.

In two days now—she drew a breath of relief—her husband would depart, and she herself be freed from the constant anxiety, the secret apprehension.

Despite her optimism, she could not feel sure that the present happy state of things would last indefinitely. But at least she had this comfort, that he stood on firmer ground: went out towards the test a saner, stronger man. He owed to her a breathing-

space in which, with clear eyes, he could look towards the future and face a fighting chance.

She had staked her last venture, had justified herself. No more could conscience claim from pity or dead love. With much to lose and nought to gain she had gone back to the past and had laid for ever the ghost of that haunting regret.

So, with renewed faith in herself, she saw her path ahead; alone, yet knit in spirit with the life of another, and the face of Van Someren smiled back from the fire, gathering dim shape in the changing heart of the coal.

But here her dreams were broken by a sound that startled her—a low rumbling noise that rose above the storm. It ceased as it came, like a sudden roll of thunder. She walked across to the windows and pulled aside the blind, wondering a little if lightning played a part in the war of the elements that raged round the house.

Darkness void of moon or stars brooded over the night, and she went back again to her old place by the fire.

She felt too wide-awake for the possibility of sleep and decided to finish a book that had interested her but had given way to her manifold duties as nurse.

She searched for it on the table that stood beside her bed and then remembered that it lay where she had thrown it down on the window-seat in the dining-room below.

Taking up the candle, she softly opened the door and made her way on tiptoe down the stairs, crossed

the dark hall and drew a breath of relief as she found herself safely within the dining-room.

She was placing the candlestick on the Chippendale side-board—the object of Majendie's early admiration—when her attention was caught by the angle at which it stood.

For someone had pulled the further end forward into the room, so that it jutted out, crooked, from the wall.

She did not pause to consider the reason for the deed, but with that sense of proportion known as "a straight eye" she put one hand behind it to guide it into place, whilst with her knee she pressed against the heavy piece of furniture.

To her intense surprise her fingers encountered space. The back of the side-board seemed open to the air.

She drew her breath in sharply and, picking up the candle, peered down into the shadows behind. Half of the panel was gone and a jagged splintered edge suggested that the missing part had been torn away by force.

She thrust her hand nervously through the gap in the splintered wood, a horrible suspicion creeping into her brain. There was no doubt about it—the cupboard was empty!

To make doubly sure she drew out the key that hung from its ribbon against her bare neck, and, turning it in the lock, lowered the light so that its rays shone into the narrow space.

The brandy was gone. She could see now a crack

that ran right across the back of the piece and in the centre had been enlarged with the help of a knife in the worm-eaten, thin partition of wood.

A feeling of utter horror descended on April as she stood there, powerless, in the grip of despair.

That this could have happened, at the eleventh hour . . . this unforeseen and cruel death-blow to her hopes!

The clock on the mantelpiece chimed slowly twelve and with the broken silence her brain began to work.

Was it yet too late? Could anything be done?

Resolutely she turned towards the closed door. Opening it, noiselessly, with the candle in her hand, she stole across the hall to the room where her husband lay.

Here she paused, holding her breath, listening intently. Someone was stirring within and a faint ray of light filtered through the crack around the shrunk old wood.

For a moment April hesitated, battling with her fears, then, with a steady hand, she tapped upon the door.

"Come in!" She threw it wide and paused on the threshold, nerving herself to meet whatever lay beyond.

The room seemed aglow. For besides the bright fire three candles stood burning on the table by the bed. And propped against the pillows, with flushed, excited face, her husband laughed back at her, a glass in his hand.

"Why . . . it's Stormy Petrel—to your blue eyes, my dear!" He tossed off the remainder of the drink as he spoke. "Now—it's no use scolding—it's too late for that—the deed's done—and you must admit it was devilish neat, too!"

He threw his head back and laughed noisily—laughed till he choked and coughed and fought for breath.

"Damn it all!"—he reached out a hand above his head for the bottle that stood on the mantelpiece beside him.

But April's eyes had seen it. With the courage born of despair, she moved quickly forward, her face white and set.

"No, you don't!" He was out of bed, divining her intention, seizing his treasure with a fluttering white hand.

He stood there, swaying slightly, an evil smile on his face.

"Cyril"—she clasped her hands together as she spoke, her whole will set on rivetting his attention. "Think—for one moment. Think how brave you've been!—and how you've won back health . . . and steady nerves . . . and *sleep*."

She leaned a little towards him, her eyes holding his.

"Are you going to throw it away?—by a silly, schoolboy trick. Think of what it means?—not tonight—but *tomorrow*—of the old horror—the old black despair . . . Surely it's not too late—to play the man again?"

She saw his face quiver, that her words went home, and went on desperately, following up the thrust:

"At least you owe me this!—I ask it in return for all that I have risked. I've had such hope for you—won't you try . . . Cyril . . . won't you try *once more*?"

He seemed to hesitate under her steady gaze. Then a look of cunning altered his expression.

"Not this time, my dear. It's *my* show, now."

He felt for the bed behind him and sat down on the edge.

"If you're a wise little woman you'll see the point of it."

With the bottle clasped against him, as a child hugs a toy, he raised the other hand with feeble emphasis.

"It's like this——" Solemnly he shook his finger at her. "You've all had your way with me, at Foxton, and here—with that fool of an old Doctor muddling around! But now . . . it's *my* innings . . ." his voice rose shrill; "justice—shimple justice—thatsh-all-I-shay . . ."

With the wild light in his eyes—those fluttering, restless hands, she realised the hopelessness of all argument; that he was past reason, beyond sanity, that she could do but harm by active intervention.

And yet—she dared not go! To leave him, sitting there with the burning candles by his side, the brandy in his grasp!

Unconscious of the picture that she made in the fire-light, with that glory of copper hair that fell about

her face, she stood there watching him, praying for a sign.

The long lines of her dressing-gown gave her a childish grace and she held the folds together with one hand at her breast, where the lace edge of her nightdress with its blue ribbons peeped, showing the round white beauty of her throat.

"You're looking—very charming—tonight, my dear."

The man's voice roused her with its carefully-articulated, flattering speech.

"Little—Stormy Petrel—what a good name it is!—shame ole' Stormy Petrel—an' devilish pretty, too!"

A new fear seized her—the sense of her own peril—and she backed quickly towards the half-closed door.

But before she could reach it he had slipped in between and violently turned the key in the lock.

He held it up to her, wild eyes on her startled face.

"Not so fast, my dear"—again that jarring laugh—"you weren't invited here—but since you've come, you'll *stay!* I don't want the house roused about my ears."

He seemed suddenly steadied under this new suspicion, conscious too of a further excitement that stirred the weakened brain. "It's not every night I can have a chat with my wife." He pushed a chair towards her. "Sit down," he said.

Her courage rose anew under the sting of pride.

"You seem to forget?" She looked him straight

in the eyes, her head held high, though her heart was beating fast.

"Oh, no," he sneered at her. "I'm not so bad as that! But the situation has—you must own—a certain charm!" He turned deliberately and poured some more brandy in his glass.

"I'll drink a new toast—in honour of the occasion." He raised it in mid-air with a hand that suddenly shook, spilling part of the contents down the sleeve of his pyjamas. "To the King's Proctor," he cried, and tossed it off.

She saw clearly then. The whole generous folly of the past anxious weeks rose up and overwhelmed her.

"*You daren't!*" The words rang out with the scorn of a challenge. Horror and loathing held her as she stared back at him.

"And why not?" Still he smiled as his eyes ran over her—from that halo of shining hair to the little high-arched feet.

"Come, come, Petronilla—d'you think I *want* to lose you . . . ? And as to the law"—he gave a mocking laugh—"it's not likely to recognise *your* version of the story. Oh, no, my Stormy Petrel—I've got you now tight. You're my wife still—you can't get away from that."

He took a step towards her, with restless hands outstretched.

"Come—kiss and be friends—it's no good sulking now . . ."

For a moment she stood paralysed by this crown-

ing insult—powerless to move before the unsteady figure.

And then it seemed to her that a presence intervened, that she was caught back by a strong loving arm, and the deep voice sounded, urgent in her ears.

"Through the window, quick, and go for the dog—the dog will protect you—the dog and the storm . . ."

The numb feeling passed; she was across the floor, her hands tore the curtain aside, wrenched round the handle. The strong wind without entered into the sport, forcing the window back and with a roar and leap it filled the low room, the candles guttering, as she slipped past into the rain and the noisy blustering dark.

The gale seemed a live thing that clutched at her skirts, her wet hair was blown, blinding, across her eyes, as, with bent head, she fought her way across the soaking grass that sucked the thin slippers at each step from her feet.

But little she heeded the discomfort of her flight—her whole soul bent on that haven beyond the cliff where Esau—Van Someren's gift—would answer to her call.

A wet rose-tree as she passed, through the dark, flung out a mischievous arm to hold her back. She heard the thin flannel of her gown rip across and the thorns tore her bare flesh as, heedless, she ran on.

But in the welcome lull as she reached the sheltering cliff the sound that she dreaded fell on her listening ear.

"Petro . . . nilla . . .!" and then the echo of a

laugh as the wind caught it up and tossed it on to her.

On she pressed, breathless, fear lending wings to the little bruised feet on the steep stony path.

And then in a moment she was conscious of a check. She was up to her ankles in loose soil and clay, stumbling ever forward with bruised hands outstretched, climbing, sinking, grazing her knees, fighting for her breath.

Sharp stones came rattling down from the cliff, stinging like spent bullets upon her face and neck, and with a cry she gave a last desperate spurt, conscious that the gate was near at hand now, looming up before her out of the night.

"Esau . . . Esau!" she shouted to the dog; but her voice was drowned in a sudden dull roar—as though a mighty wave broke overhead—and the air was full of a suffocating weight that drew her back and under, forced her to her knees . . .

In a great horror she went down into the dark.

CHAPTER XXVII

POWDERY-WHITE and pearl pink Martigues lay in the sun, like a fair and naked woman risen from the sea. Her slender feet still dipped in the blue of the Etang, her hands were flung above her head, voluptuously she stretched one rounded shoulder to the hills, one white arm to the west.

The olives bound her dainty head and high above her brow a slender cross rose up to the halo of the heavens: the symbol of a Faith new to her pagan pride that had smiled on the swarthy faces of Phœnician galley-slaves.

It dominated her, this straight black crucifix—with its stern note of penance, of hidden power and pain. About its base lay piled that towering heap of stones that Legend whispers lie there, each one a pilgrim's sin.

But ever beneath its shadow the siren, Martigues, smiles—that slow sweet smile of the South that welcomes her Lord the Sun—and lifts a fold of the bridal veil that the Mistral, passing, flung on her rose-pink walls and Judas-trees and the green-grey roofs of her town.

For the North wind holds the secret. By night and by day he scatters the chalk white dust with his prodi-

gal artist hand; and mystery is born, a hidden loveliness under that silvery sheen, soft as the breast of a dove.

About her, like veterans of an army left on guard, dark cypress-trees are stationed, silent, in single file. Bent and gnarled and battered, grey-headed, they protect her vineyards from the icy breath that drives across La Crau.

Away to the North the hills rise up with jagged cliffs of chalk, and in between is spread that wide azure lake where the Rhône, with a last tremor, pauses, hesitant, before she glides through the ancient town to her lover the tide-less sea.

Beauty . . . beauty everywhere! But to April's weary eyes it seemed too divine; subtly to emphasise the world as God designed it and the contrast wrought by man.

She stood on a little promontory above the still lake, looking back at the town bathed in the sunset's glow, watching the curved black prows of the fishing-boats, homeward bent, with their brown sails like night-moths, that skimmed across the blue.

A cold breeze came stealing towards her on the bank, flicking the quiet water into mare's-tails as it passed, and April, with a shiver, turned back to the road, inexpressibly weary, with that heavy cloud that lay persistently for the last few weeks over her aching head.

She could not quite define the sense of ill-health, that weighed down her limbs and seemed to numb her will. She had a strange presentiment that some-

thing threatened her, some further calamity that nothing could avert.

It seemed that she moved forward like a woman in a dream, flying from the past, from the nightmare of those days that had culminated in her husband's tragic death. She thought bitterly at times it would have been kinder far to have shared Lord Essenden's fate: to have gone down, gone out, from the memory of man—than to live on, unhurt, save by serious shock, to face all that followed, alone and unbelieved.

The accident itself, that heavy fall of cliff that had cut short the life of an unhappy man, seemed veiled from her in a dim uncertain haze from which she had emerged, cruelly awake, to the grim ordeal of the public enquiry.

For the second time she had heard, on eager news-boy lips, the London streets ring with the echo of her name.

"Tragic death of an Earl!" The cry resounded still, the staring leaded type rose before her eyes.

For the nine-days' scandal had proved a treasure-trove to the Summer papers, starved for lack of news. The facts of the case were embroidered generously; her own retreat to Coddell, her assumed fantastic name, the secret visit paid her by the husband she'd divorced, the gossip of the village, the sneers of the town, dished up in pungent form for the greedy, wondering crowd.

Alone the harassed Doctor had stood by her side, but powerless to save her from public opinion. There was no hushing up a scandal like this, no mitigating

the plain unvarnished truth—this living with her divorced husband under a pseudonym and his own tragic death in her garden at night.

Even Sir Hugo was swept with the tide, bitterly upbraiding her for this last deceit.

Majendie was far away, Van Someren in New York. Never was a woman more utterly alone.

As soon as her presence could be dispensed with in town she had slipped away to Paris to a quiet hotel, and there by chance had met an artist friend of hers full of a recent visit to the "Venice of Provence."

It sounded so restful a spot, so remote from the world that April welcomed the thought of a brief sojourn there; conscious, too, that Marseilles would be near at hand, a gateway to distant lands, where oblivion lay.

But even at Martigues peace was not for her. Her shattered nerves forbade it, and the longing for sleep that mocked her weary eye-lids night after night.

For a woman cannot live by courage alone. At the end of a long strain she comes to a breaking-point, when the body cries aloud a protest to the soul, when vitality gives out and Dame Nature stirs to punish poor humanity that oversteps her law.

And now it seemed to April that she held on to life—to hope, to sanity—by a single silver thread: Van Someren's promise, that gleamed, faint but clear, through the tangled net around her that the dark Fates wove.

Somewhere help lay. Somewhere in space a soul answered back to her faltering prayer. Somewhere

One believed; would look into her eyes and know that she was clean and true and worthy to be loved.

She bowed her head as she struggled on up the white stony road and the tears came trickling down over her pale cheeks; tears of sheer weakness, of knowledge that at last the flesh could bear no more, that the spirit's flame lay low, flickering with this feeble far-off breath of hope.

Somewhere . . .? She clasped her hands and to the cross above, black and still and silent against the evening sky, she sent up a last prayer from that dark Gethsemane where her soul lay wrestling with her wounded womanhood.

Two peasants passed carrying firewood, bundles of twigs from the cork-trees on the hills, balanced firmly on their stiffly-poised heads; their swarthy faces hidden, their supple bodies slim by contrast with their baggy trousers of blue corduroy, drawn into clumsy gaiters at the knee, of checked brown and yellow felt, and these in turn lost in their black sabots.

They gave her no sign of greeting save an incurious glance, for this was a country beyond that Southern track where the Englishman is met with a welcome on each face, dark eyes eager for his well-filled purse.

April quickened her steps, past the straggling yard where the salt fish hangs to dry all day in the sun, past the public-baths that are open but four months in the year—for who would dream of washing when the Mistral chills the blood? Then down into the dusty "place" with its double row of planes, its sleeping curs, its cafés, its big "boulangerie."

Here little groups of girls, their shawls around their heads, were loitering and gossiping, the day's work at an end; the fisher-folk were coming up from the quays beyond the bridge and the first lamp gleamed in the shadow of the Church.

The Hotel du Petit-Paradis—that anachronism in a town visited for the sake of its Pagan charm—stood white and square, an ugly pendant to the long string of planes. It was labelled by a notice board advertising the lure of excellent garage and far-famed "Bouillabaisse."

Indeed the place reeked of both, petrol and saffron! —with a flavouring of stale beer, and that musty-fusty smell due to the polish used daily on its floors and the unopened windows of a provincial hostelry.

April's soul sickened as she entered the hall and made her way to the counter where the letters always lay.

The courier was in, but "Rien pour Madame!" The proprietor shrugged his shoulders with a smile as one who hints that the fault was not his; if he had his way, Madame should have letters by each succeeding post!

Madame had taken a walk? The weather was sublime—as ever in Martigues, that highly favoured town. And tonight they would be gay! A party had arrived, for dinner, from Marseilles in two large motor-cars.

The shrieking throb of a gramophone and a sound of shuffling feet from the salon beyond seemed to emphasise the fact. The evening *would* be "gay"—

there was no doubt about it; as gay as nine vigorous children of the South, freed from restraint and full of red wine, black-bearded, sonorous, quarrelsome and vain, can make it in the interests of a birthday fête.

The gong rang for dinner. April's head swam as she walked into the stuffy room where the hungry company was already gathered round the steaming bouillabaisse.

She slipped into her corner in the angle of the wall which was hung with a collection, wonderful and diverse, of water-colors and oils, pastel and black-and-white, the payment-in-kind of many a needy artist.

The waiter, hot and breathless, with the sudden invasion, thrust a large tureen under her nose, where the bread powdered with saffron floated on oily broth and a greasy plateful of grey mullet boiled to rags flanked it and was crowned by an empty cray-fish shell.

It smelt rank and fishy. April pushed it away, turning in disgust to the coarse country bread.

A great roar of laughter broke out at some jest made by the leader of the "jeunesse de Marseilles."

Someone was eating sausage redolent of garlic and the penetrating odour filled the stuffy room. The waiter in his haste tripped on the polished floor, letting fall a cascade of clattering knives and forks.

April, with a little gasp, rose to her feet. She could bear it no longer—the heat, the noise, the smell; her eyes were dim with the faintness creeping over her. With a great effort she crossed the crowded staring room and gained the hall beyond, lips tight with the

struggle to master quivering nerves. She paused for a second to draw a breath of air, her hand against the wall, steadyng herself.

Then a strange thing happened. For, as she moved, the floor, with its alternate tiles of black and white, moved slowly, too; telescoping back, empty foot by foot, into infinite perspective, miles and miles of space.

Still she struggled forward, her dazed mind bent on reaching the stone stairs that slowly sank away. Back . . . back . . . back . . . She clutched at last the rail, her face white and frightened, and the crowning horror fell. For the stairs were over-lapping, sliding step on step, slipping backwards, too . . . and a red wheel turned in her head hot with pain, and a great roar of waters rose up in her ears . . .

She tried to cry for help, but no voice came. And then she was moving forward; swept into that head-long pace where all things receded into distance without end—caught up and dragged along into eternal void, a vortex full of dazzling light that fiercely sucked her in!

* * * * *

They brought the Doctor to her, a withered gruff old man.

"La Grippe," he pronounced it. She must be put to bed.

They closed every window and carried in a stove that smelt of scorching lacquer and a vast eider down.

And when she moaned for "Water!" they thought her surely mad. Water without or within was dan-

ger magnified! So the chambermaid concocted a wonderful "tisane," tepid and sweet, flavoured with the flowers of the lime.

And all the time there was one thing she needed but could not say. For as the fever left her and she lay there sane again, but weak with such a weakness that to move seemed a pain, she realised that she had lost the name for familiar things, that she was like a little child who can point but not explain; that words did not fit—that words would not come to that slow tongue of hers at the bidding of the brain.

She tried to tell the Doctor. But he had his set idea. It was plainly Influenza in a very serious form.

There had been fever?—Bon!—and pains in the head? He clung to the well-known symptoms and needed nothing more.

She must try now to eat. And sleep and rest her brain. To . . . 'wash her face?' He laughed at her! But her face was quite clean. This mania of the English—to wash when one was ill! He shrugged his shoulders and left her with an empty water jug.

Madame was "*très nerveuse*," he told the host below. Plenty of good strong bouillon, and fish and tender fowl. And quiet—that was essential and no evening air.

Madame would soon pull through—Madame—no doubt—was rich? He and the host discussed it with the help of a "vermouth" . . .

So the long days passed and the restless weary nights. And still she was tormented by that elusive need. Something that was missing that her sick

spirit lacked? that she *could* not put a name to, but knew in her dreams—something that would save her, would cure her frightened soul . . .

And all the while below, in a dusty pigeon-hole, Van Someren's letter lay, forgotten, out of sight.

CHAPTER XXVIII

How she reached Avignon April never knew. A great fear drove her, a fear she dared not name.

She had but one thought now, one infinite desire: to see the smooth white cliffs of England stealing up under a grey sky, above a grey sea. To leave this chattering, clattering noisy land of France, where people talked so quickly and life seemed to flow in a feverish excitement of quarrelsome fluency.

To look once more on little fields of lush grass, moist and green, on peaceful homesteads sheltered by shady oak and elm, on the stolid quiet faces with their slow Northern tongue; instead of the white glare, the vast lonely tracks of scorched rock and stony earth that seemed a sepulchre.

It nerved her for her journey. But as the train approached the broad, swift-flowing river and Avignon rose sheer above its fortressed walls, its broken mighty bridge, and the stronghold of the Popes met her aching eyes, she realised anew that it could not give her strength; that inch by inch she must fight her way over those weary miles that still lay between her and the grey belt of sea.

Dimly she remembered her last visit there, as a child with her parents, long since dead; the short halt on their way South in the quiet, quaint old town,

sanctified by age and taking its long rest after the turbulent early days of religious and civic strife.

Now, to her surprise, as she slowly made her way, leaning upon her stick, feeble step by step, to the station yard beyond, she found the place alive with clamouring hotel-porters, cabmen, chauffeurs, touts. After a long wait for luggage she took her seat in the crowded omnibus, gorgeously upholstered and drawn by a pair of horses that, with liveried men, seemed a new departure in the management of the sleepy old hotel of hallowed memories.

They rattled through the narrow streets over the cobble stones, with a triumphant flourish of cracking whips, and turned into the court-yard where oleander and fig still clung lovingly to the crumbling ancient walls.

For the Hôtel de l'Europe in mediæval days had been the palace of the Archbishopric and still retained, to "the eyes that see", a furtive haunted air of intrigue and temporal power and secret tyranny, that have left ghostly visitants in the cloistered inner courts who stir when the great, chiming bells ring out before the dawn.

So weary was April that she went straight to bed in the narrow cell-like room allotted to her.

The place seemed alive, like a vast rabbit-warren, with its twisting corridors and innumerable dark stairs. Bells pealed and voices called and maids and valets ran, with the bump, bump of luggage resounding through it all.

The waiter brought her soup and a wing of that

fowl which by some invisible decree must always appear in a French table d'hôte, night after night; and, shame-faced, hides its head under various "noms de plume"—but is of the same "feather" throughout the masquerade!

"Jean, Jean . . .!" A voice shrilled out in the corridor beyond and with a frantic gesture the waiter sped away, but moved perhaps by a vision of that sweet white face, so weary in its halo of gleaming hair, returned anon to enquire Madame's further needs.

"You seem . . . busy to-night?" April liked his looks. The man had honest eyes under swarthy brows.

"Toujours, toujours! Madame." He spread out his hands; all day, all night in the season it was ever the same.

He piled up the plates with a conjuror's skill and paused, balancing the tray on a steady turned-back palm.

It was due, so he said, to the excellent catering. The chauffeurs were fed the same as "Monsieur le Président."

And the chauffeurs it seemed, under the new régime—this era of the motor-car—made or marred custom, bringing in their train master and man wherever the food promised well on the great white roads.

"They eat—they are pleased—they return"—he shewed his strong white teeth—"they say it is the best halt from Paris to the South—or they are short of

petrol—or a tyre gives or a screw—que voulez-vous?”—he smiled at her—“it is human nature, hein?”

All night long, as April, worn-out, lay tossing to and fro on the hot feather-bed, the place hummed with life like a busy human hive and the motor cars poured into the cobble-stone garage; hooting, snorting, grinding brakes and the omnibus rumbled out, with the lighter click of horses’ hoofs and that ceaseless whip that cracked. Then steps in the corridor and luggage, bump on bump. And once she heard an English voice that mourned forgotten “soap” and the inevitable response in a gruff bass key that adjudged all countries “dirty” except his priceless own!

So daylight dawned clear and white. She watched the sun’s rays steal between the slats of the shutters to the floor and a little lull succeeded, broken again—alas! by a noise of boards being polished and the heavy tread of the “boots.”

April rang for her coffee and the friendly waiter came.

Madame had not slept? Impossible!—how was that? The noise of the motors? Ah—one accustoms oneself! Madame should change her room—away from the garage. Over there—he pointed—in the little further court—the rooms were small—but quiet—he would speak to the “patron”.

Back he came later—a picture of delight. It was all “bien arrangé”. She could move in after twelve. Madame would be on “*his* floor” still—he rubbed his horny hands with a sympathy that held a broad hint of finance.

So night came round again after a weary day, lonely and long and suffering, for her head was racked with pain. Sleep! She must have sleep. She longed for it, she prayed, full of that nervous horror that weighed upon her brain.

Her room looked into a little court, so narrow that the sun could barely penetrate the deep damp well. Upon the further wall two birds in a cage were hung outside the airing-room of the hotel laundry: two little huddled birds!—once like herself so full of joy and life, now, with clipped wings, weary prisoners forgetting how to fly.

She watched, as the light faded, how the restless swallows dipped from the square of evening sky above, in hurried aimless flight.

They seemed to mock the prisoners with their shrill passing note as their free pinions sank and rose and skimmed the dreary cage.

She drew down the blinds and turned out the light. The place was still at last as she crept into bed. Only the big bells tolled from the Château des Papes, the swallows still twittered their uneasy “good-night.”

She was just sinking away into feathery space when a door slammed below with a sound of heavy feet that clattered on the paving-stones of the echoing court-yard. Backward and forward the loud steps came with ever that grating, noisy door to mark the ebb and flow.

April rose at last and, pulling aside the shutter, peered down angrily into the dark well, to find it now alight with a lantern and the glow thrown from the

busy still-room beyond. The court was used as a passage-way from the Garage for chauffeurs, a short cut to the service-room, where, night and day, those meals were served "fit for a *Président*," and the servants fore-gathered to smoke and drink. As the hours wore on the noise seemed to increase, fitful bursts of laughter, the clatter of plates, a gay voice in song and the slamming of doors, magnified in the narrow tunnel of the court.

Worn-out April lay, crying helplessly, too utterly ill to reason or to pray. She had taken a sleeping-draught and the drug—denied its power—added to the strain of her quivering nerves.

But again, as daylight dawned, there came a little lull, a brief breathing space and the wings of sleep touched her. She fell into a doze full of troubled dreams to awake with a cry and sit up, breathless, her hands to her head.

The letter? His letter—the answer to her own? . . .

In that dawning moment the secret lay bare. This was what she needed, this was what she sought, the baffling desire that had haunted her.

Van Someren's reply! She threw back her hair and gave herself a little shake to stir the sluggish brain. Van Someren's face rose up and warmed to life, the grey eyes shone, the strong mouth smiled at her.

It seemed at last she heard the key turn in her prison door. Help was coming to her, she had but to wait and gather up her courage in patience and in faith.

She could almost smile when the waiter came with her coffee and enquired if Madame liked her new room?—if Madame had “well-slept”?

The luxury of water, hot and plentiful, after the discomfort of the Martigues hotel, helped her through her dressing and she slowly made her way through the winding passage and down into the hall.

The Manageress greeted her with a chilly smile as April asked for information in nervous, halting French.

She had been ill, she said, and was hardly strong enough for the long journey before her without a few days' rest.

If the Manageress knew of some quiet place en route? that she could recommend—with a passable hotel?

Her last words faltered, she leaned on her stick, wearied by the effort to make herself plain.

The old woman looked at her with a faint shade of pity, marking the thin white hands, the nervous, quivering face. She took down a bundle of circulars from the rack and turned them over quickly with a business-like air.

There was Valence—an easy run—and the hotel “assez bien”—with a garden, she believed—and from there Madame could go to a certain thermal station a few miles away where the waters were said to hold a miraculous cure.

“Valence.” April nodded her head. The glib tongue ran on. There was a train at two, the Paris express, it stopped at Valence . . . Here the tele-

phone bell rang. "Hallò . . . !" She stooped to it whilst the thoughts cleared anew in April's tired brain, evolving a plan.

If only she could sleep!—the garden tempted her . . . Surely with a garden there would be quiet near!

"You wish to give up your room?" the Manageress returned. "Bien, Madame. The omnibus will start at 1.15."

"Yes—I will leave by that. Thank you very much." The pitiful blue eyes were raised to the black. "And I want—to send a telegram."

With a shaking hand she began to write the words on the empty form. Then with a frown she paused, pencil in air, a look of strain on the delicate, puzzled face.

"If Madame would permit. I spik a leetle Engleesh . . . I could save Madame ze—peine, per'aps?"

"Oh, *thank* you!" April moved aside gratefully. "It's to the Hotel at Martigues—the Hôtel du Petit Paradis. If you would please say all letters to Valence—to the Hôtel de la Poste." It sounded apposite.

The few English words sent her pulses fluttering. She watched the other write rapidly, translating her message, and finish with a flourish of the fine French hand.

"Voilà!"—the manageress passed it to the chasseur—"and tell Pierre to fetch down luggage from 44—for the two o'clock train—et dépêchez-vous donc!"

The sharp voice had returned, the business-like manner.

"Madame desires her account?"

April nodded her head. The momentary excitement had left her limbs shaking.

She crawled slowly upstairs and lay down on her bed.

Followed the rattling drive over the cobble-stones, the bustling station, the shrill note of the train. Then the long journey, with the whir of the wheels, the stuffy heated carriage like an endless bad dream.

Valence at last. More cobble-stones; the weary formalities of luggage and of room; and then a sense of silence bought at a heavy price—of utter isolation in a world unknown.

Dinner was served her; she left it to the man. Even through her misery a faint amusement shone when, with an air of profound deliberation, another dark-browed waiter with kindly black eyes suggested that “poulet” was the very dish for her.

So to rest at last, in the quiet dim old room, with its scanty furniture, its heavily-curtained bed.

Sleep . . . sleep . . . She tossed and turned and prayed for it to come, that golden gift of God to man, valued alone when lost.

And then—as the kindly presence hovered over her—she sat up with a cry of infinite despair; her hands to her ears, her eyes wide with fright, as again noise rose up, overwhelming her.

The shrill note of fiddles, a patterning on the floor, the throb of a monotonous well-worn waltz, high laughing voices, quick pulsing feet . . .

She rang for the chambermaid as the clock struck eleven.

"Mais oui!—they danced tonight—in the salon below—" . . . ("la jeunesse" again!—la jeunesse de Valence). It was a grand evening for the sleepy town . . . For tomorrow was the marriage of Monsieur Jouvé's son—he who was the manager 'Aux Dames de France.' A fine business that—as Madame no doubt knew? with shops everywhere—"et tout ce qu'il y a de mieux!"

This night they danced at the party for the bride—Mademoiselle Berthe, la belle-sœur du maire. "Pas si jeune que ça!"—an expressive wave of hands—"mais une dot! . . ." the white teeth flashed expressively.

What pity Madame was "souffrante!"—it was a pretty sight . . . To sleep? "Ah non!"—she laughed joyously—no one would close their eyes—mistress or maid! "But then—one could *sleep* most nights in the year!"

CHAPTER XXIX

"A PITY that Madame must leave—Madame had l'air malade——" the fat proprietor eyed her with suave sympathy. There was also a "petit supplément" as Madame herself would see. If only she had given up her room overnight!—he shrugged his heavy shoulders—but—business was business! The omnibus was five francs. Yes, each way. Madame's luggage was of a weight! . . . and Madame's dressing-case could hardly be included in the "petits bagages——" The extra attendance was for meals upstairs—and the lights? "mais—voyons!—the lights were always charged!"

April knew they cheated her, but paid the bill in full, seeing the greedy face through a misty blur; glad to escape that harsh insistent voice, the beady eyes full of half-insolent pity.

She climbed into the omnibus, whilst around the step a crowd of servants clustered, pestering for tips, wishing her "bon voyage", suggesting she forgot how much she was indebted for their unfailing care.

Swaying, jolting, slipping on the greasy cobblestones, the lumbering conveyance carried her away.

Dreading the fresh journey, clinging to her purse, knowing that her wits were fast forsaking her, April sat huddled in a sick despair.

A porter helped her out. She stood there dazed.

Madame had not her ticket? Madame must make haste! The train was nearly due and the luggage to be weighed. "Billets" to the right, "bagages" to the left.

Someone hustled her. Leaning on her stick she fell into the queue of townsfolk pressing on, excitable, vociferous, with that lack of courtesy peculiar to a station crowd abroad.

She tried to rally her thoughts as she found herself in turn looking into the sour face of the ticket vendor there. But in front of the narrow opening, her memory played her false. She bit her lip and stammered:

"Un billet—première classe?"

"Where to?" The official glared down at her. "Eh bien, Madame?" he rapped on his desk.

A peasant woman behind with a market-basket pressed impatiently against her. "Mais, dépêchez-vous, Madame!"

And still she stood speechless, with white, strained face, struggling to recall the name that evaded her.

Her mind was a blank, she trembled on her feet—it seemed to her the moment spread into eternity.

She heard a man swear and a girl's mocking laugh.

"Tiens—c'est une folle!"

And then, in despair, she was swept on again, past the narrow space, out into the hall by the impatient crowd.

She felt with her hand blindly for the wall; in the shelter of the book-stall, she paused to get her breath.

This then was the end—the end of everything . . . “C'est une folle!”—the shrill voice lingered in her ears.

All her pride lay shattered and the tears streamed down. She stood there weeping like a child lost in the dark.

The busy crowd dispersed, and with a sudden roar the express tore in on its journey from the south.

Carriage doors slammed and luggage was thrown out, porters ran and shouted, and into the empty hall a thin straggling line of passengers appeared, mainly “du petit commerce,” armed with rug and bag and here and there the black portfolio of the law.

An old peasant woman, wrinkled face aglow under her frilled cap, was clapped in the embrace of a buxom young matron, a child, armed with a toy-balloon, clinging to her skirts; and beyond the little group two “pioux-piouxs”, laughing noisily, blocked up the gangway with their haversacks.

A tall man in an overcoat shouldered his way determinedly past, followed by a truck piled up with luggage and over-topped by a crate full of live ducks, quacking dolorously, their necks outstretched.

“Pardon, Madame——!” A blue-bloused arm thrust April back in the corner, where she stood, as the porter tried to turn the cumbersome affair. For a second it seemed that a heavy cabin trunk must surely fall and crush her and she gave a shrill cry, wrung from her nerves, as she crouched against the wall, her eyes wide with fear, her hands upraised.

The man in the overcoat wheeled sharply round

and turned a keen glance full on her face: that white frightened face in its halo of hair that shone in the shadows surrounding her.

Then, through the misery clouding her brain, April heard a voice that came from far away, a voice that called to her, the old fond name:

"Honey!—it's you!" Someone clasped her hands . . . trembling she looked up into her lover's eyes.

The next thing she remembered was she was sitting on a trunk, a hard cabin trunk with metal bands, the sharp taste of cognac in her mouth, and Van Someren was leaning over her.

"Don't talk, Honey—just stay still."

The face near her own was full of anxious care. This was Heaven, no doubt, at the end of the dark. . . . She closed her eyes again with a fluttering happy sigh.

As the spirit filtered quickly through her veins, things became warmly, pleasantly confused. She had a dim idea that strong arms carried her out into the sunshine, the cool, sweet air. Then they were jolting over cobble-stones, her cheek against a coat that felt human and warm. The rough frieze pricked her skin, but she smiled as she lay, propped against the broad shoulder that meant so much to her.

Once she moved her head and a voice said: "Dear?" just that and no more and she was at rest again.

Then blurred memories of the kindly chamber-maid, the same low room with its slippery bare floor, the bed with its heavy curtains looped through a

crown and the welcome touch of the cool smooth sheets.

So, effortless, sleep came to her; sleep, dreamless sleep!—with its silver wings enfolding her tired spirit, as a mother rocks her child, a smile upon her lips, knowing all is well.

April awakened slowly—as sick people will—into a quiet consciousness, hazy and sweet, and saw without wonder that she was not alone.

For the setting sun shone with an amber glow through the open casement on the figure of a man. He sat on a high chair, within the window bay, feet planted apart, head a little bent as though he thought deeply in that rigid pose, afraid to move a muscle, ears on the alert. The grey eyes under their fair, shaggy brows stared straight ahead and once he bit his lip and then again he frowned, wrestling with the problem that absorbed his mind.

For a time April watched him under half-closed lids, realising slowly all his presence meant: the love, the unswerving faith that had carried him day by day, over land and sea, in answer to her cry.

“Lorry.” He turned with a start, a quick anxious smile.

“You awake, Honey?—feeling better, dear?”

“Sure.” The old word rose tremulous to her lips in a sudden sweet mischief that breathed of sanity.

“Tell me how you got here? I don’t quite understand.”

He crossed the room on tiptoe and stood beside her

bed, looking down at her with a quick throb of joy to find the sweet face peaceful, the blue eyes raised to his, clear as a child's, in steady comprehension.

"Certain it won't tire you?"

"No." She shook her head and slipped a little hand, half-shyly, into his.

"Well—it's quite simple." He drew up a chair and sat down facing her in the soft half-light.

"I mailed you a letter, weeks back, to Martigues, but the fool porter lost it—or never gave it you. I guess he's sorry now!"—he gave a grim smile—"for I got tearing mad . . . to come all that way and miss you by two days—it was the limit, sure! And then just as I'd fixed up to hunt at every halt between there and Paris your telegram came. I'd missed the only train for Pas-des-Lanciers—isn't that the name? So I had to wait and catch the first express to-day and—well, the rest you know."

He stooped and kissed her hand.

She gave a little shiver as her memory cleared.

"And found me—*like that!* Supposing you hadn't come? Lorry!" She sat up suddenly, her face white and strained. "That woman called me *mad*"—her voice was sharp with fear—"you don't think . . . you don't think . . . ?" the words would not come.

"Why, Honey!" He caught his breath, his heart wrung with pity. Then steadily he finished the wild broken phrase: "that you're likely to go mad?" His voice rang clear. "I think you stand as good a chance as a snowball in hell!"

He saw the strained look leave the weary eyes, a faint, quivering smile steal to her lips.

"A 'snowball in hell'"—she repeated the words. "Isn't that like you!" and lay back again.

"It's been my daily fear"—she spoke beneath her breath—"it's lived with me and slept with me and haunted my dreams!—the thought of going mad, abroad and alone, of losing that last hold . . . oh! *can* you understand?"

"My *poor* darling"—the tears were in his eyes—"but it's all over now, a nightmare of the past. And we won't talk of it—you must just get well and leave all to me and believe what I say. There's nothing wrong with you except shattered nerves. I give you my honour that's all there is to it. It's a thorough breakdown from trouble and shock. I've seen many a case among my own friends—we're a nervous race, you see, and we live at a strain. All you need is rest, utter rest and care. And I'll see you get it, too!—that's why I'm here!"

She smiled again at that and turned on her pillow, watching him with grateful eyes, with that intent look of the physically weak that takes the place of action.

Then again she spoke.

"Lorry—you got my letter?"

"The last one?—from Martigues?—why, yes—it's here." He drew out his pocket-book and shewed her the contents.

"All yours, Honey! They've kept me alive these months."

"Then you know . . . everything?"

"Sure." He nodded his head.

"About . . . my husband's death?" He could barely catch the words, and he realised that something fresh was troubling her.

"I read it in the papers first. And then your letter came."

In the papers——! She looked at him, knowing what they said.

"And what did you think? Tell me, Lorry—quick!"

He saw her suspense and answered hurriedly.

"I'm afraid I was so terribly glad, I just said 'thank God.'" His voice sounded guilty, for he wondered jealously how far her husband's death had affected her. "To know you free—at last!" He drew a deep breath.

"But what did you *think*?" Her blue eyes searched his face and she watched the light break in on it, comprehension grow—all his love and trust shining back at her.

"Oh *that*! Why I thought . . . nothing at all! Newspaper trash! *Of course* I understood. It was fine and good, whatever the world might say. D'you think I'd ever doubt you?—ever dream of it? Why, I'd shoot myself first, and deserve it, hands down!"

She gave a little sob of passionate relief, her fingers clasped together, her face warm with pride.

"I ought to have known . . . oh! you dear, you *dear*! But I've worried dreadfully, wondering what you'd say, wondering why you didn't write, almost in

despair. And just now I watched you, sitting in the window, with your face so grave and sad, puzzling over something, and I thought—forgive me, dear—it might have been that—all that dreadful story raked up again."

"Silly child!" He stroked back the beautiful soft hair that fell in a cloud about her pale face—"you've got to quit fretting now and start in getting well. I'll tell you, if you like . . ." he looked down at her, his eyes so full of worship that a faint colour stole under her transparent skin as she met his warm glance.

"I'll tell you the hard nut that I was cracking there. I was wondering how I'd find out the law of the land. And my French isn't perfect—not pure Ollendorf! I eke it out with German—and gestures—and cash!" He threw his head back and gave a happy laugh.

"*I must* tell you, Honey! an adventure en route. In the luncheon car on my way from Paris, I happened to leave my gloves behind. So back I went to the table, which was filled with the next relay—a lot of chattering, little men with napkins under their chins. And to them spake Lorry, in his best New York-French—'J'ai laissé mes dents, là—sur le table.'

"You should have seen their faces! Disgust isn't the word. And then I realised the joke and stood there and *roared!* They thought I was crazy and gave me the frozen mitt. They were Dent's gloves—you see, that's how I got mixed—and my French, as I said before, is somewhat 'nouveau art.' Still I guess it works all right—in sections it's correct. And

I thought I'd go round this evening and hunt up the mayor. It's no good waiting, is it?" he smiled down at her. "I'd like to have the right to look after you—now."

Simply he laid his plan of action bare.

"I want to get a hustle on—I hate losing time. It's too late to be married today . . ." his eyes sought the clock; "but what about tomorrow, would that suit you, sweet?"

For a moment April stared at him in speechless amazement. Then, slowly, the sweet lips curved, the eyes began to dance; she hovered, delicious, on the verge of mirth.

Half-humorous, half-aggrieved, he looked back at her.

"Perhaps I've put it badly—I always was a chump!"

At this her laugh rang out, rippling and clear—the first real laugh through all those weary weeks. And life was sweet again, and hope encompassed her . . .

Her hands stole to his shoulders, she drew his head near, her soft lips to his cheek, her voice still full of mirth; and then and there she summed him up, loving, merciless:

"You great—big—baby! You *dear American!*"

CHAPTER XXX

IT was a Winter day, born of snow and frost, with the nip of the North wind that swept the streets clear.

The sky, grey blue and far away, formed a background for the clouds that were heaped-up like cotton-wool in gathering bank on bank, and over them an orange sun was perilously poised as though a touch might send it rolling into space.

The cold was intense, but even at this hour Bond Street was crowded, both pavement and road. All the world was shopping, for Christmas loomed near, and the windows, where the frost had left a delicate, lace-like rime, were full of temptation: of much that man might need and many things that no one could possibly desire!

Women wore harassed faces, consulting little lists, clutched their purses firmly and shivered in their furs. Small children dawdled, ever dragging back breathlessly to long for treasures forbidden them by Nurse.

In the dip by Conduit Street, a cold policeman stood, with an aggressive air manufacturing "blocks." Right under his nose a taxi was wedged between two other vehicles, puffing noisily as it ticked away "tuppennies" like a busy money-spider, held up to allow the side-streets to disgorge a steady flow of traffic across the narrow road.

A man lowered the window and his face shewed clear; clean-shaven, fair, with keen grey eyes.

"Anything up, Inspector?—we've no time to spare!" and a sweet voice inside laughed mischievously as the cold policeman vouchsafed no reply.

"It's all very fine, Honey!—but there's heaps to be done."

Van Someren drew in his head and pulled up the glass.

"Just look at that huge van!" he gave an impatient sigh—"now what does it want to come promenading in Bond Street for?"

"To see the Christmas shops, of course."

She smiled as he turned and drew the end of her sable stole tighter round her throat.

"You look stunning now—like a little chipmunk! Two bright eyes peering out of a fluff of fur! And you'll want wraps, good and plenty, tomorrow on the boat—we're in for a cold week on the water, dear."

"I like it," said April—"I always love the sea. You needn't be afraid of a troublesome . . . wife."

He gave her a sunny look as he noticed the slight pause, and tucked a hand into her wide muff.

"I can't believe it somehow"—his voice was low—"it seems too good to be real—like the end of a fairy-tale. In a few hours, Honey," he gave a little laugh, "'April Panhasard' will belong to the past. I wonder if you're sorry at all?—it's been a dandy name . . . I wish old Boris were here—I always liked that boy. We'll try and catch him, though, on his way back home. He must bring his young charge to have a

look at the States. You'd like that, wouldn't you? to see the 'cousin'—eh?"

He laughed again as a faint flush colored her face.

"I'm very fond of him"—she gave him a teasing glance—"it might be dangerous, you never can tell!"

"That's the best of life"—he refused to be drawn—"You never can tell!"—it's the essence of adventure." He glanced at his watch. "And extremely appropriate to the present situation. Confound that policeman!—I shall get out and push!"

But as he said the words the taxi gave a kick, the cold autocrat lowered his hand, and they were jerked forward, into a motor bus with which they played "cup and ball" up the narrow hill.

"I heard from Sister this morning's mail," Van Someren ran on, "she's terribly glad to think we sail tomorrow—and, incidentally, bring home Harry Dyson Tremayne!" He gave a little laugh. "The kid's rather fond of him, between you and me. It was cruel bad luck that, just as we returned, he had to come over to Europe himself. They were engaged, you know, two years back and then she broke it off—it's a long story—but I fancy it's going to turn out right in the end. We were at Yale together—he's a real sport . . . I'd sooner Sister married him than any other man."

"She sent me a sweet letter, too—I'll shew it you bye and bye." April twisted round to look into his face; "but I want to ask you a little favour now—Oh, it's nothing much . . ." She had an air of guilt,

like a child who hugs a secret tight, yet longs to let it slip.

"Out with it, Honey." He watched her, amused; then, as she went on, he gave a slight start.

"I should like, when we get there, to buy . . . it myself. I've a notion it will bring us luck, somehow. Besides . . ." she hesitated afresh, avoiding his gaze.

"Why sure—if you want to." In his voice was a touch of the swift excitement that was stealing over him. Was he to know at last?—the mystery laid bare that he had thrust so loyally away from his mind.

For never by a word or sign had he questioned her. It seemed to lack chivalry; and the thought that he had spied in a moment of unconsciousness on April's troubled past—the memory of that pleading look that she had given him there, on their first strange meeting—for ever sealed his lips. And now quick wonder rose. He breathed a silent prayer that this, the last faint barrier, might go down into dust. With an effort he controlled himself, his hands shut tight and his voice when he spoke was almost indifferent.

"May I humbly ask the reason I'm defrauded of my rights?"

She looked, half-shyly, back at him.

"Promise you won't laugh?" and as he nodded his head, his face oddly grave, "I bought . . . this one . . . there." She touched her left glove. "It was a sort of pledge. You'll—perhaps—understand." Her words came hurriedly. "I wanted to feel free—to start life again—and I *couldn't* with . . . 'his'

ring on my hand. Of course I had to have one!—it made . . . things easier. So I just went and bought it and I took a sort of vow—never to look back—but only . . . ahead. To try and believe that the Future still held something good . . . something I couldn't see—to try and—be brave."

"My darling!" The cry rang from the depths of his heart. He tasted in that moment the fairest fruit of all that life bears to the few who love in loyalty.

Regardless of everything he drew her near to him and kissed the sweet face that had lost its look of strain.

The taxi slackened speed with a grinding of the brake.

"Lorry, *will* you behave!"

With a flushed smiling face, she opened the door and stepped down to the pavement.

A man, passing, gave her a long admiring glance, drinking in the beauty of her sweet unconsciousness.

But she looked neither to right nor left. Serene and dignified she chose the exact moment, a gap in the busy stream; with a quick swing of supple hips, head daintily erect, she moved across and the portals of Percy Edwards swallowed her up.

Van Someren followed, smiling to himself. He watched her cross the shop with a deliberate step and pause before the counter at the further end.

A suave individual with pink hands and an air of perfect possession moved forward to ask her needs.

"What can I shew you, moddam?"

A shaft of winter sunlight drifted to where she

stood and burnished her hair, warming the clear pallor of her skin, against the dark background of the panelled wall.

"I want a wedding-ring."

The shopman gazed at her and gave a little start as a faint memory stirred.

"Certainly, moddam. Twenty-two carat, I presume?"

She tried in vain to check the laugh that threatened her dignity as the "precious" voice went on in a silky undertone: "We always recommend it—the only quality we guarantee—to *wear*."

He turned away gracefully, with a bend of the waist to draw out the identical velvet-lined case.

Van Someren leaned on the edge of the counter watching April.

"Oh, Lorry!"—she whispered—"isn't it *too* quaint? It's the same man and the same words—the 'moddam' and all!"

"But don't drop it *this time*—for me to pick up! Eh, Honey?—or have you forgotten, dear?"

He stood there, square and tall, a formidable guard, screening her from the further group of busy purchasers.

She gave a little gasp. Her sea blue eyes went wide. She forgot the listening salesman, the ring and all the world!

"Why . . . why!"—she caught his arm—"it *can't* be . . . it was *you*!"

"Sure," said Van Someren, smiling back at her.

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